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**IDEALISM AMONGST NEW SECONDARY TEACHERS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

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**Introduction**

This paper is a byproduct of research started in 1982, suggested to the author through reading *Students into Teachers* (Collins, 1969). No similar study had been carried out in Papua New Guinea so this study was designed to find out more about the social background, motivations and conditions of new teachers there. In countries such as the United Kingdom, U.S.A., Canada, Australia and New Zealand the topic is very well researched, but in Third World countries there is very little research data about new teachers. Further reading led to the production of ten aims for the survey which are listed below (Palmer, 1983)

- 1) Investigate the incidence and causes of teacher dissatisfaction, and attempt to relate this to existing attrition data (Kuhlman, 1981);
- 2) find out what courses or parts of courses at Goroka Teachers College (GTC) or the University's main campus seem unsatisfactory when first year teachers look back on their training;
- 3) find out teachers feelings about the system of school postings;
- 4) find out what guidance is provided for new teachers;
- 5) ascertain how new teachers view the teaching styles of their more experienced colleagues;
- 6) discover whether or not new teachers change their teaching methods during their first year of teaching;
- 7) ascertain new teachers' commitment to teaching;

- 8) find out how well new teachers have settled into their schools — ie. try to understand more about the process of professional socialisation;
- 9) find out more about the views of new teachers on the system of inspection;
- 10) find a method of correlating the preservice grades of the new teachers with their on-the-job success.

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### **Research Design**

An existing research questionnaire from a very detailed survey of new teachers by Taylor and Dale (1971) was much modified in early 1983. Modification was essential as the U.K. researchers had been able to visit and interview new teachers and to produce two questionnaires to be completed at different times in the first year of teaching so that changes in attitude over the probationary year could be studied. The geography of PNG and constraints on time and money made this approach impossible so a single questionnaire was devised with one hundred questions. This questionnaire was trialed in the Eastern Highlands Province (where the author worked) with the eight new teachers in the province. The method chosen was for the new teachers to fill in the questionnaires but also to discuss them to ensure clarity of meaning and to remove inappropriate questions.

For the trial, two new teachers were in a large school in Goroka while the six others were in the most remote and inaccessible of the Eastern Highlands secondary schools. This school was three hours' drive from Goroka on an unsealed road which was frequently impassable in the rainy season. Within PNG as a whole there are many other schools more inaccessible and with fewer facilities than this school, yet to some extent the fact that most new teachers in that year in the Eastern Highlands Province were put in the most isolated school does indicate that the welfare of new teachers may not feature too highly on the list of official priorities. The problems of the posting are stated by one new teacher:

School's isolation from Goroka and Kainantu. Transport hard to catch. Too costly.

Nonetheless these new teachers seemed happy in their work despite the difficult conditions. A degree of idealism certainly seemed to keep them cheerful in adverse circumstances and it is the theme which this paper will explore.

As a result of this trialing the questionnaire was cut down to sixty nine questions which were modified by increasing the number of open-ended questions to allow the teachers to comment more freely. The questionnaires were taken to the 1982 GTC graduates by teaching practice supervisors with two reminders being sent out and the cut off date for completed questionnaires being 1 February 1984.

There were 132 possible new teachers (having excluded those who had been trialed and those who were at GTC from other countries such as the Solomon Islands. A 58.3% return (77 teachers) was obtained.

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### **Idealism**

Idealism in common usage (Garmonsway, 1969) is defined as “a tendency to guide one’s conduct by ideal (the finest imaginable) standards”. There is a second more specialist usage (Bullock and Stallybrass, 1977) which explains idealism as “the philosophical theory that the only things that really exist are minds or mental states or both”. It is the common usage that will be used in this paper, looking at new teachers as being idealistic, unselfish, altruistic and public spirited in their conduct. Of course these new teachers will be far from perfect in their conduct but evidence of their pervading sense of high values will be produced in this paper from the open-ended questions as well as from an analysis of pre-coded questions and other relevant research.

Papua New Guinea is an idealistic country with Christianity its official religion and with an eight part national improvement plan (1972) and five point National Goals (1975). Both the aims and the goals are strong in the rhetoric of idealism but their practical implementation has not been easy to realise (King, Lee and Warakai, 1985).

Quotations from two very different educational leaders indicate the high aspirations that they have for young teachers:

In this light the Christian school teacher views teaching as a pastoral activity. He will try by the example of his whole life to develop each child in such a way that his every gift may be consecrated to God and to the service of other people. (Hand, 1966)

Those of us who are involved in teaching must put to the young people of this country and to those of this university that teaching was and still must be the noblest of all the professions. (Rogers, 1980)

### **Career Choice of Teachers**

Commitment to teaching for a lengthy period of time in spite of poor conditions of work may be seen as an idealistic viewpoint. Palmer (1985a) compared the results of three different surveys of teachers’ career aspirations (Kay, 1971; Weeks, 1977; Guthrie, 1983). Although there were considerable methodological differences between the surveys there was a fair measure of agreement that teachers generally show a high degree of commitment to teaching as a career. The present research showed (Palmer, 1985a and Palmer, 1985b) that factors apart from idealism affected the career choice of the teachers surveyed when they were students, even though they may not have been aware of them. For example, the sex of the teachers, their parents’ education and employment, and their province of origin all appear singly, or in conjunction with other factors, to affect the likelihood of students choosing to become teachers. To illustrate this point, the survey showed that 70% of new female teachers had fathers with jobs other than farming, whereas only 21% of new male teachers had fathers with jobs other than farming. An

explanation of this data is that fathers who are farmers see teaching as a step up the social scale and are therefore supportive of their sons going into teaching, whereas modern

sector fathers see a career in teaching as a step down the social scale for their sons but well suited as a career for their daughters. There is also a tendency for the choice of teaching as a career to run in families. 35%, of the sample said that a parent or sibling was a teacher. In Taylor and Dale's (1971) U.K. research the comparable figure was 32%. They concluded that this family tradition was thus a significant factor in career choice.

### **The Moral Imperative to Teach**

The previous section has indicated that there may be both invisible sociological pressures as well as the more obvious religious or altruistic motives in choosing teaching as a career. The new teachers were certainly altruistically inclined as 72.4% said that they had been involved in community work prior to starting training at GTC. Wohlberg (1979) showed that mission schools contributed a higher proportion of GTC students than might be expected from the mere size of the mission schools compared with the size of the system and he considered that this indicated that GTC students saw teaching as a moral imperative. The present survey showed that 30.6% of the 11 secondary schools belonged to missions, but that 44.4% of new teachers had attended mission schools. Indeed one remote rural school was the 'alma mater' to eight of the new teachers in the survey. However most of the students who attended government schools as students are also likely to be committed Christians. Weeks (1976) showed all GTC students were then members of various Christian churches, so though Christian faith may account for the idealism of teachers, attendance at mission schools alone does not account for it.

The data from PNG is not unique as there is comparable Australian data (Carpenter, 1981a; Carpenter, 1981b) where it was shown that attendance at a Catholic school was a factor in the choice of secondary teaching as a career. There are also other similarities in that a higher than expected proportion of daughters of professional parents tended to make teaching their choice of career. It is thus probable that there are underlying general sociological factors which may predispose certain categories of students to choose teaching as a career, but this does not necessarily mean that the motives of such individuals are not idealistic.

### **Some Views About Teaching**

In a survey of school leavers at two highland schools (Kemelfield and Keviane, 1976) 33% of students would have liked to be teachers, The authors concluded:

It seems clear that there is a considerable amount of idealism, concern and enthusiasm for participation in national and future development in students' thinking. (p. 57)

It seems that the new teachers retain some of this idealism yet are more realistic now they are actually teachers when looking at teaching as a profession. The disadvantages of

teaching have now become more obvious, they are in fact the day to day realities of the teacher life.

Q61 asked whether the teachers thought themselves better off, worse off, or about the same, with regard to twelve different aspects of teaching (salary, amount of work, etc.) as compared with friends in professions other than teaching. Only a limited analysis possible due to small numbers made smaller by the fact that not all sections were answered by all respondents.

**Table 1**

Responses on all twelve aspects of teaching				
	Better off than friends	Worse off than friends	Conditions about same as friends	Total % Responses
Male teachers	34.4%	27.2%	38.4%	100%
Female teachers	35.6%	18.3%	46.1%	100%
Total teachers	34.7%	25.0%	40.3%	100%

Generally these figures indicate male teachers having more complaints, perhaps being less idealistic, though more decisive; that is, they are more certain than female teachers as to whether they are better or worse off than their friends. Generally however, 75% of the responses of the new teachers indicated that teachers saw themselves as better off or the same as friends who had chosen other professions, so in spite of the disadvantages which they see in teaching they feel they have made the best available choice.

Q62 asked about how long teachers thought that they would stay in teaching. 43.8% saw themselves staying in teaching for more than five years. 41% might leave within five years and 15.1% were likely to leave teaching within five years. On the positive side it can be said that only 15.1% of the new teachers considered that leaving teaching was a strong possibility.

When asked (Q64) what the reasons would be if they did leave teaching, teachers who answered the question were virtually unanimous that it would be the actual conditions of teaching that would drive them from the profession.

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In this survey, as in others (Wilson, 1981), the complaints were pay, long hours of work, poor housing and lack of promotion. Other points, such as limited social life, teaching outside the area for which one was trained, tiredness and wantoks, were also mentioned, but only by a few teachers. Bacchus (1984) also analyses these and additional causes of dissatisfaction, such as late payment of salary and frequent transfers of teachers.

Perhaps in terms of long term planning it is the 15% who think they will leave teaching in five years or less who are the greatest worry. As background, it should be stated that primary teaching is completely localised and secondary teaching is about 80% localised. There are about 2000 secondary teachers in the system. Kuhlman (1981) made a survey

of attrition among secondary teachers and found that in the early 80s attrition rates of 10% to 12% of the total number of teachers were occurring but a few years later this had dropped to about 4% (Kuhlman, 1995). The secondary system however is still expanding and government would like to reduce the percentage of expensive expatriate teachers as soon as possible, because even a modest 4% attrition rate a year of the total of 2000 teachers, which uses up more than half the yearly output of teachers from GTC, is too high. Ways of reducing this attrition rate would be welcomed by government.

### **The Hard Work of Teaching**

Teachers in Papua New Guinea work very hard. This is shown very clearly by Rowe (1983) and is also borne out by the survey. Rowe showed that inspectors had unrealistic expectations of the amount of work teachers should do so that when actual times taken for all the different jobs they ought to do were added up, it totaled more hours than were available in the day. This survey shows that all the new teachers had in their largest class more than the 35 students which is considered a standard class size. One teacher claimed a class size of 46 students in his largest class. New teachers teach above a standard teaching load of 30 lessons of 40 minutes duration each week. 34% of new teachers taught above the Grade 7 and 8 limit set. Nearly one third of new teachers averaged 32% of their teaching time teaching a subject in which they had not been trained. New teachers were also assigned out of school (extra curricular) tasks and in addition many took on other voluntary duties. These seem to average about three hours per week. Teachers also feel that the specialist rooms (science, home economics, design and technology etc.) are only just adequate for the work they want to do. Some of the new teachers also felt that they put more time into lesson preparation:

Teacher 69: “They (experienced colleagues) seem to have less interest in preparing lessons and aids. Me or myself I realised that my method of teaching is different because I seem to devote more of my time preparing lessons aids etc.”

With regard to duplicating facilities and visual aids there were mixed feelings with general satisfaction at the availability of facilities in town schools and consternation at the lack of them in rural areas. There are also problems in the supply of materials needed to make use of the available equipment Teacher 43 (at rural school, stating what visual aids he uses): “The black board simply because that is the only equipment available”

Teacher 44 (at town school): “Things I need are right here so I make use of them. I was just lucky to have applied here where things are very well organized”

Teacher 76 (rural school): “If only the overhead projector can be available then the teaching of students will be much easier.”

Teacher 68 (rural school): “Lack of paper and ink so no work sheets at all made, everything written on black board which takes ages.”

### **Relationships in Teaching**

On the positive side, teachers almost universally felt that they had good or very good relationships with other staff members, generally good relationships with heads of department and head teachers, very positive feedback from secondary inspectors and only a minority mentioned problems with student relationships as indicated by problems with discipline. The following free responses from new teachers indicate relationships

between new teachers and each of the above categories, probably focusing more on negative comments than their actual proportion justifies.

Teacher 9 (of staff): “Everybody is friendly and helpful and we get on well”

Teacher 21 “Teachers bother their own problems and do not care at all about others”

Teacher 39 “Teachers tend to mind their own business but when approached they are willing to help”

Teacher 7 “Difference is very wide between whites and nationals, seniors and juniors”

Teacher 8 “I feel it all depends on your own approach to the rest. If you are friendly they too will be friendly.

Teacher 5 “I feel that the administration people of the school do not care about what I do — I feel like giving up”

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Teacher 2 “The headmistress of the school is a one minded person. She does things her ways, never listens to us. She always changes whatever we bring forward to her. She even interferes with the private lives of teachers”

Teacher 20 “I feel our subject mistress is not doing much to help new graduates with our difficulties”

Teacher 41 “I found the subject heads were always willing to help me and this made me feel as if I was at home”

Teacher 54 (of inspectors, all favourable) “The advice I was given was very useful. It helped me to know what areas of my teaching needed improvements”

Teacher 10 (of students) “Nearly all kids at this high school are friendly”

Teacher 14 “If a student breaks a rule and I punish them they keep on breaking them again”

Teacher 1 “There is one particular class who just don’t stop making noise even during tests and no matter how many times you stop them they will not listen”

Teacher 15 “No sense of study have to drive mules to study — breakdown of school rules by students persistently — punishment of work in the school is insufficient”

Teacher 48 “Once in a while some students get stubborn and talk back. I just had to control my temper — from hitting them. I end up putting on long hours of punishment. Sometimes it helps!”

Teacher 51 “As the students regard themselves as city kids they pay less respect to teachers”

Teacher 53 “Senior students who are smokers smoke in front of teachers who smoke”

Teacher 57 “I got a little too friendly with students and they started calling me ‘Mate’ instead of ‘Mister’. It has now stopped”

Teacher 58 “Students can be cheeky at times when I soft with them, but not always”

Teacher 61 “Misbehaviour during night study—punched that student; no more sight of him as close to me as he used to”

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### **New Teachers as Professionals**

The new teachers were asked (Q57) to sum up their initial reactions to their experiences as a professional teachers. They were asked to tick the three most appropriate reactions. The results in descending order of response for this are set out below.

**Table 2**

Reaction to experience as a teacher	Responses
1. Satisfaction at doing a worthwhile job.	49
2. Acceptance by society as a full adult.	31
3. General enjoyment.	25
4. Physical tiredness.	21
5. Excitement.	20
6. Mental tiredness.	15
7. Not what I had expected from my teaching practice experience.	12
8. Anticlimax.	8
9. Teaching is not the right job for me.	5
10. Relief.	3
11. General depression.	3
12. Tenseness.	2
13. Your own suggestion.	2

Further questions were asked about illness and most new teachers seem to have been absent from school through illness infrequently and to have been no less healthy than when they were students.

Table 2 shows the new teachers to be very positive about their experience as professional teachers, with the negative and unclearly phrased questions obtaining very low scores. This, combined with the general good health of the new teachers, should be taken as evidence of their overall idealism. The top three factors are their own general positive feelings of satisfaction, enjoyment and excitement, combined with the good opinion they believe society has of them for being a professional teacher. Negative feelings about teaching, such as anticlimax, tenseness and depression, all score very poorly, and although physical and mental tiredness score moderately well, only five of the new teachers conclude as a result that teaching is not the right job for them.



If Table 2 is looked at in terms of organisation theory (Herzberg's Motivation/Hygiene theory, see Herzberg, 1966), the new teachers generally would appear to be in Herzberg's category of 'motivation seekers' a category essential for organisations to function successfully.

### **Advice**

Finally there is the area of giving and receiving advice. One of the features of many free responses is the number of occasions where the new teachers explained how they had accepted advice given by other teachers, senior subject teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers or inspectors or had complained that no such advice was proffered. One question also asked the new teachers to

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give advice to future new teachers. In spite of it being the last question on the questionnaire, this was answered by 73 of the 77 new teachers. The advice given was generally of a moralising nature, with most advice being to prepare all lessons well and in good time and also always to be ready to ask advice from other teachers. Some responses follow.

Teacher 30 "Teaching is quite difficult but if you plan your time well you will, enjoy it very much. It is interesting to work with pupils"

Teacher 34 "Work flat out during your first few weeks of teaching and during that time try to be firm with students, then you will find everything will be easy"

Teacher 38 "Be prepared to do more work. Have less 'free time. Give up social activities"

Teacher 46 "Don't let the comments and criticisms of the experienced teachers or senior teachers worry you. That is just to help you improve. Keep working hard and good on how best you can perform"

Teacher 54 (extract) "Do not ever give up for you will later learn that such experiences could turn out to be very, very enriching towards your professional development"

Teacher 61 "Be prepared to accept any subject you were never trained for, if shortage of teacher. That is what I am doing now"

Teacher 63 "Devote and commit yourselves to your profession and seek advice from your superiors about anything you are in doubt. 'Seek and you will find' etc."

Teacher 68 "It is a challenging job and a dedicated teacher will have to sacrifice most of his leisure time to help improve his teaching"

Teacher 74 "Accept advice and follow, so as to apply new things learnt at college"

Teacher 76 "Taking students from the known to unknown and use type of language in relation to their understanding"

### **Conclusion**

The advice given by new teachers to their successors can perhaps be seen as advice they themselves had received or wished they had received. Generally the advice concerns the abnegation self and of putting of the welfare of the students first. These are high ideals but anyone familiar with PNG schools might well fail to notice these virtues applied consistently in practice.

What is true is that young Papua New Guineans are idealistic and those who take up teaching as a career are particularly idealistic. They generally work hard in difficult conditions for low pay but remain optimistic about their chosen profession.

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