

RESEARCH NOTE

THE PROBLEMS OF BEGINNING SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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The problems of first year teacher are well researched in many developed countries. In less developed nations however they have been researched rather less thoroughly. Papua New Guinea is typical in this respect, for there has been no full-scale survey of beginning secondary school teachers.

In October 1982, the author started a project concerned with all new secondary teachers in the national education system. The work builds on previous research on secondary teachers in Papua New Guinea, particularly that by Flaherty (1981), Guthrie (1983a, 1983b), Kuhlman (1981), Wilson (1981) and Wahlberg (1979). Research by Richardson and Van der Veur (1968) and Smith, Carss and Power (1979) on primary school teachers is also relevant. It is intended that the survey will:

- 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 teachers have settled into their schools i.e. 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 pre-service grades of the teachers with their on-the-job success.

These aims are perhaps rather ambitious, but in attempting to answer the questions implicit in and arising from them, it is hoped that a broad general outline of the problems faced by new secondary teachers will be obtained.

Progress on the project so far has been satisfactory. It was decided to adapt an existing questionnaire from a UK survey of the late 1960s (Taylor and Dale 1971), which was trialed with eight new teachers in Eastern Highlands Province. Details of this part of the project were given at a recent GTC Research Seminar (Palmer 1983a). Following the trial and in the light of comments from colleagues, the questionnaire was reduced from 100 to 69 questions, the ratio of open-ended to pre-coded questions was increased, and the language of the questionnaire was simplified. The new version was distributed to potential respondents by GTC staff in July 1982 while on teaching practice supervision, for it was felt that personal involvement of staff from GTC would increase the response rate. This hope seems to have been justified, and so far 82 of the 162 questionnaires have been returned. Reminders were sent to those who had not yet replied in September and again in December 1983.

To give college departments feedback, a preliminary analysis was carried out on answers to questions about GTC courses (Palmer 1983b). The opinions of new teachers about the GTC courses varied widely, frequently contradicted each other, and were sometimes internally inconsistent. However, it emerged that two GTC courses received more unfavorable comment than others. They were Language Studies (English), with 30% unfavorable comment, and Professional Studies, with 18% unfavorable comment.

The criticism of Professional Studies arose partly because it is compulsory, and partly because many students felt that insufficient time was given to 'practical' problems such as assessment. College lecturers have wider horizons, and perhaps resent spending too long explaining and practicing assessment procedures at the expense of other parts of the course.

Language studies is one of 11 options offered to GTC students from which they must choose two. The greatest single complaint was a lack of 'grammar' in the course. This appears to be the same type of concern as that about a lack of practice in assessment in Professional Studies. In each case, they wanted more emphasis on the 'mechanical' aspects of the subjects. In English the fact that the syllabus materials for the upper classes of provincial high schools are still incomplete presents an additional problem. This is of particular concern to new teachers, and they may perhaps express their concern as a criticism of GTC courses. Nevertheless, the Language Studies department has recognised inadequacies in its courses, and is at present altering them substantially.

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