
SDA Teacher Education: OUR AGONY AND OUR ECSTASY

From the beginning we Seventh-day Adventists have been a pragmatic, impatient people. We have wanted to learn this morning in order to help this afternoon. We have seen (and continue to see) every moment as fraught with eternal consequences. Like our agrarian ancestors, we have considered hand labor a necessary precursor to mind labor. And when gathered in worship we are likely to sing, "Work, for the night is coming." In short, we have wanted everything—and especially our education—practical, timely, and brief.

Consequently, we have always worked to the minimum in teacher education. If the states in and near which our colleges were located certified with less than a four-year degree, then that was our standard. We have raised our requirements only when coerced by public certification bodies. In general, we have mindlessly followed the "calf trails" of minimum state standards, rather than designing teacher-education programs and methodologies to fulfill long-range educational and research objectives. As teacher education goes, we have been a rather planless people.

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The same is not true of our ventures in medical, nursing, and theological education. In each of these categories, we have tried to stretch beyond state or regional standards. We have sought to engage in original research, creative programming and supervision, and to find more valid

interpretations and applications. In these fields, at least, we have not dared to lag behind!

Time Is Running Out

While we have been content to jump through state certification hoops, however, other forces have conspired to indict us all. We are being addressed when the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education nervously reports that "teacher education is being viewed by many as impotent, so useless as to be unnecessary and even undesirable."¹ We are included in the National Commission's recent observation that "the teacher preparation curriculum is weighted heavily with courses in 'educational methods' at the expense of courses in subjects to be taught."² And *our* teacher education is condemned by Mary Anne Fowles' finding that fully 41 percent of elementary-level teacher education majors are unable to subtract fractions correctly, that 71 percent fail in seeking the percent of a whole number, and that more than one-third cannot explain the symbol for "less than."³

And now the critics have begun differentiating between the teacher-education institutions. Kowalski warns that "the academic and clinical work required at colleges and universities varies greatly in both quality and quantity from state to state and even within a single state."⁴ (And all this time we thought state certification and accreditation were our ultimate protections!) Kowalski enumerates some of these embarrassing

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differences between teacher-education programs:

First, the human resources that teacher preparation programs can draw on are far from equal. Large colleges of education might employ from 150 to 200 faculty members; small institutions, by contrast, might assign responsibility for teacher education to just one or two people. Second, teacher colleges differ widely in curriculum. One program might not require a separate course in reading-instruction methods for elementary school teachers, for example, but another might require three or four. Third, different programs offer students widely varied opportunities to observe and teach in actual classrooms or simulated classroom settings. Some colleges require early and continuing student teaching, but others require no more than the minimum number of days the state mandates. Fourth, the balance between required education courses and required courses in other subjects, such as English and mathematics, varies from college to college.⁵

Since states approve teacher-education programs on the basis of minimum requirements, the point is quite clear: *Some programs far exceed the minimum requirements, while others in the same state barely meet them.*

Although there has been an oversupply of teachers in the past decade, during the same time the number of teacher programs actually *increased* in number—from 1,172 in 1973 to 1,287 in 1983. These totals, however,

do not reveal the whole story. The biggest increase occurred in the smallest institutions, where the offerings are usually most limited. In institutions enrolling 5,000 or more students, 60 teacher preparation programs were dropped between 1973 and 1983. But during the same decade, institutions with total enrollments between 1,000 and 5,000 created 62 new teacher-education programs. And the smallest schools (enrolling fewer than 1,000 students) began a whopping 113 new teacher preparation programs!⁶

Though most SDA colleges have been engaged in teacher training for almost a century, tenure and parochialism can no longer shield us from the glare of public scrutiny and comparison. All of our programs are small. Operating our teacher training on very modest budgets (even by our own standards) we have been so involved jostling with our better-fed siblings that we have had little time, and *no* stomach, for research and discovery.

But we can longer hide behind minimum standards. The approved teacher preparation programs standing at the low end of the scale are in danger of being evaluated out of business.

Action Rather Than Reaction

Now is the time for great dreams and bold action! We can succeed in teacher education only as we learn from our past: henceforth we must build (philosophically and clinically) toward the *maximum* rather than the *minimum*! We must strive to march beside the best rather than slink about among the anonymous. We must wrestle to the top in creativity and development rather than wallow at the bottom in conformity and staleness.

We should not be surprised if there is currently much anguish among SDA education faculties. They are, after all, caught in a terrible bind: education enrollments are down while the entry-exit requirements are up. They are being asked to achieve more with less. And their philosophical imperatives for the next 100 years appear either nonexistent or in serious disarray.

Donna Kerr admonishes, "Teacher education can only be as good as its placement on the undergraduate level allows, and that is not very good."⁷ Why? Because the undergraduate connection limits the time available for teacher education. It also limits the money spent on professional

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training, since undergraduate programs compete for resources within a narrow spending range. Even if teacher education were to break even (which it rarely does), it still loses; professional training done well simply must cost more than general education. In line with this observation, Clark states:

As important as any other reason for breaking the undergraduate connection is the link between program proliferation and the placement of teacher training at the undergraduate level. You cannot stop one without stopping the other. As long as teacher training is conducted at the undergraduate level, all bachelor's-degree-granting institutions will insist on their right to train teachers. If no teacher education can be offered at the undergraduate level, the competitive advantage in student recruitment will not govern an institution's interest in teacher education.⁶

Corbin goes even further in his contention that we should get out of undergraduate teacher education. "The present system of scattering education courses throughout the four-year undergraduate programs lends neither coherence nor focus to the training process," he writes. "A far more sensible case could be made for deferring all teacher-education courses until the bachelor's degree is completed."⁹

Doyle Watts presents at least five fond wishes in his delightful whimsy, "In Search of Unicorns and Effective Teacher Education."¹⁰ But his recommendations are nevertheless gripping. In summary, he recommends:

1. Since the objective of recruitment is to attract high-quality applicants, not large numbers of "warm bodies," admit only a preestablished, limited number of teacher-education applicants.

2. Accept applicants from only the

top half of the college student body, academically, while also requiring documented, above-average knowledge and ability in speech, reading, and writing skills.

3. Assign the most competent faculty to teacher education, based on academic preparation, experience, teaching, and scholarly performance.

4. Implement published program objectives drawn from empirical data, with coursework, instructional activities, and experiences designed to achieve those objectives.

5. Require at least one year of *full-time* enrollment in the school (or department) of education.

A Time for Great Dreams and Bold Action

The action that will again place our teacher-education venture within the circle of excellence, at once dynamic and compelling, involves the following interlocking steps:

Step One. Accept into our teacher-education programs only students holding a bachelor's degree with a subject-matter major.

Step Two. Require a minimum of one academic year of concentrated preservice and practice leading to a master's degree.

Step Three. Demonstrate that our programs (a) integrate a research base on teaching with substantial clinical practice, and (b) require of our students appropriate levels of intellectual achievement and excellence in teaching performance.

Step Four. Increase the level of intra-institutional funding for teacher-education programs to match the financial commitments to medicine, music, nursing, science, and theology.

Step Five. Restrict admission to teacher education to those students who show academic proficiency in their undergraduate studies, and who exhibit a commitment and personality appropriate to the profession.

Ways to Accomplish These Goals

Each of our colleges may attain these goals by slightly different paths. However, certain mechanisms for change should benefit all. These organizational and human relations guidelines place emphasis on (1) quality rather than quantity, (2) integration rather than isolation, (3) consolidation rather than dissipation, (4) networking rather than bystanding, (5) optimism rather than negativism, and (6) measurable competencies and skills rather than vague feelings and armchair assessments.

The educational ministry is perhaps the oldest evangelistic arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If it is lost through neglect or lack of foresight, then we run the real risk of losing our sense of world mission.

Is anybody out there listening? Now is the time for great dreams and bold action! □

FOOTNOTES

¹ American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, *Educating a Profession: Extended Programs for Teacher Education* (Washington, D.C.: AACTE, 1983), p. 26.

² National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1983), p. 22.

³ Mary Anne Fowles, "The Knowledge Gap in Content Areas: A Concern in the Preparation of Elementary Teachers?" *ERIC Doc.* 160 549 (1978), p. 3.

⁴ Theodore Kowalski, "Teacher Education: Here's Help for Separating Fact From Fiction," *The American School Board Journal* (May 1985), p. 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Donna Kerr, "Teaching Competence and Teacher Education in the United States," in Lee Shulman and Gary Sykes, eds., *Handbook of Teaching and Policy* (New York: Longman, 1983) p. 139.

⁸ David L. Clark, "Better Teachers for the Year 2000: A Proposal for the Structural Reform of Teacher Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* (October 1984), p. 117.

⁹ Warren Corbin, "Universities Should Get Out of the Business of Teaching Teachers," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 23, 1985), p. 88.

¹⁰ Doyle Watts, "In Search of Unicorns and Effective Teacher Education," *The Clearing House* (February 1985), pp. 237, 238.