

M U S T E R

Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project

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Discussion Paper

21

Becoming a Primary School
Teacher in Trinidad & Tobago,
Part 2: Teaching Practice
Experience of Trainees

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Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER)

MUSTER is a collaborative research project co-ordinated from the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex Institute of Education. It has been developed in partnership with:

- The Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.
- The Institute of Education, The National University of Lesotho.
- The Centre for Educational Research and Training, University of Malawi.
- The Faculty of Education, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa.
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MUSTER is focused on generating new understandings of teacher education before, during and after the point of initial qualification as a teacher. Its concerns include exploring how new teachers are identified and selected for training programmes, how they acquire the skills they need to teach effectively, and how they experience training and induction into the teaching profession. The research includes analytical concerns with the structure and organisation of teacher education, the form and substance of teacher education curriculum, the identity, roles and cultural experience of trainee teachers, and the costs and probable benefits of different types of initial teacher training.

MUSTER is designed to provide opportunities to build research and evaluation capacity in teacher education in developing countries through active engagement with the research process from design, through data collection, to analysis and joint publication. Principal researchers lead teams in each country and are supported by three Sussex faculty and three graduate researchers.

This series of discussion papers has been created to provide an early opportunity to share output from sub-studies generated within MUSTER for comment and constructive criticism. Each paper takes a theme within or across countries and offers a view of work in progress.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is one segment of a two-part study that was designed to investigate the process whereby primary school teacher trainees in Trinidad and Tobago learn to teach using qualitative methods of interviews, observations and document analysis. This paper presents a detailed description and analysis of the arrangements for field experiences in practical teaching and the actual teaching practice itself. The overall intention was to gain insights into the process of learning to teach by obtaining information through observing teaching practice sessions, and by documenting and analyzing the views of the major stakeholders involved, that is the trainees, the Teachers College lecturers, who supervise teaching practice, the principals and cooperating teachers in the primary schools. Key research questions related to the provisions and orientation made for teaching practice in the college and schools, and perceptions of stakeholders on that provision; and the perceptions of trainees on the teaching practice and its usefulness.

A key finding of the study is that teaching practice as it is currently conceived and executed is problematic, though trainees do make some gains from the programme. There needs to be more consideration of the kind of primary teachers needed in Trinidad and Tobago, raising questions about the current training curriculum and the structure of teaching practice. It emerged that trainees experience difficulty reconciling theory and practice and there is a need for more reflection on action and reflection in action. There is also a need for more partnership between schools and colleges based on better communication and more clearly defined roles. The current arrangement of teaching practice, organized as three blocks, is seen as inefficient and there is a strong argument for a longer school attachment. Furthermore, there is a need for clearer criteria in the selection of cooperating teachers and provision of incentives. There is also a need to revisit assessment procedures.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

One of the main goals of teacher preparation programmes is to help trainees to develop into effective, practising teachers. In the Trinidad and Tobago context, this goal is pursued at the primary level through both in-college courses and field experiences in cooperating primary schools.

The question of how trainees can best be prepared to become effective classroom practitioners has been engaging the minds of teacher educators world-wide. Calderhead and Sharrock (1997) note that, in grappling with this issue, some teacher educators have been at pains to make a clear distinction between *teacher education* and *teacher training*:

It has been argued that *teacher education* is involved in the all-round education and development of teachers, emphasising teaching as a profession involving well-informed judgment; whereas *teacher training* refers to a more mechanistic approach to teacher preparation, more akin to a craft apprenticeship involving the mastery of well-defined routines. (p. 192)

Calderhead and Sharrock argue, though, that such a distinction might not be very useful since the process of learning to teach is likely to embody aspects of both teacher education and teacher training:

Such a distinction, however, may be simplistic and unhelpful. Obviously, learning to teach does involve the acquisition of certain knowledge and skills that are essential to adequate classroom performance. It is also the case, however, that learning to teach involves being able to reason about one's actions, being able to justify particular strategies, understanding the subject matter, children and their ways of learning, and having a conception of the purposes of education and the ways in which schools operate in order to promote education. (p. 192)

The sub-study reported in this paper comprises one segment of a two-part study that was designed to investigate the process whereby primary school teacher trainees in Trinidad and Tobago learn to teach. The other sub-study - *Becoming a Primary School Teacher in Trinidad and Tobago, Part 1: The Curriculum in the Teachers' Colleges* - explored the primary teacher training curriculum as documented, espoused, and enacted within the Teachers' Colleges. This sub-study presents a detailed description and analysis of the arrangements for field experiences in practical teaching (hereafter referred to as "teaching practice") and the actual teaching practice itself.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The overall intention of the study was to gain insights into the process of learning to teach by obtaining information on the teaching practice process, by observing teaching practice sessions, and by documenting and analysing the views of the major stakeholders involved in this process, that is, the trainees, the Teachers' College lecturers who supervise the teaching practice, and principals and cooperating teachers in the primary schools to which trainees are attached for field work. Specifically, the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- *What are the provisions for practice within the Colleges and the cooperating schools?*
- *How do trainees make use of their preparation for teaching practice in the teaching practice sessions in cooperating schools?*
- *What are the views of the Teachers' College supervisors, cooperating teachers, cooperating principals, and trainees on the efficacy of the provisions for practice in teaching?*
- *What orientation to teacher preparation is evident in the teacher preparation programme of the Teachers' Colleges?*

1.3 General Procedure

Early in the research project, it was discovered that some stakeholders view the teaching practice enterprise as problematic. The decision was therefore taken that two teaching practice rounds would be observed and analysed – the session in the second term and the one in the fourth term of the two-year Teachers' College programme.

The researchers relied on the goodwill of the Teachers' College administration and academic staff for the execution of the work. Consequently, the sample of lecturers (supervisors) for this investigation consisted of those who were willing to have the researchers observe their teaching practice sessions. For the most part, the trainees on the second teaching practice round were different from those on the first round since the policy is that trainees are rotated among supervisors.

The data-collecting strategies involved analysis of documents, observation of trainees as they taught classes in the schools, observation of post-teaching conferences between trainees and supervisors, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with trainees, supervisors, cooperating teachers, and principals of cooperating schools.

In the analysis of teaching practice field data, use was made of Shulman's (1987) distinctions among the various kinds of knowledge that are important for teaching. Shulman identified these as content knowledge, general pedagogic knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational aims and values. The particular

Shulman categories used in this analysis were content knowledge, general pedagogic knowledge, and pedagogic content knowledge.

1.4 Organisation of the Report

In addition to this chapter which sets the scene for the study, the report consists of four other chapters. Chapter 2 describes the arrangements for teaching practice. Chapter 3 presents and analyses data obtained in the observation of the first round of teaching practice sessions held in the second term of the 1998-1999 school year for the 1998-2000 student cohort. Chapter 4 presents and analyses teaching practice data for the same cohort, but for the second round of teaching practice sessions held in the first term of the 1999-2000 school year. Comparisons of performances in the two rounds are also presented. Chapter 5 presents a summary and discussion.

CHAPTER 2

ARRANGEMENTS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE

2.1 Preparation of Trainees

The study focused on the preparation of trainees at the two Government Teachers' Colleges – Valsayn Teachers' College and Corinth Teachers' College.

2.1.1 Valsayn Teachers' College

There is a very structured programme for preparing trainees for practice teaching at Valsayn Teachers' College. The programme is co-ordinated by one of the staff members who is a lecturer in Education. The programme is referred to as PET – Professional Enhancement for Teaching. The aims of PET are:

...to prepare student-teachers to develop and demonstrate the pedagogical skill necessary for effective teaching. In addition, it seeks to motivate them to display an attitude of professionalism in their approach to teaching, as well as, to stimulate a desire for improvement of their competence and performance through membership in professional organisations. Moreover, it seeks to imbue in student-teachers an enthusiasm for this dynamic profession, so that graduates will recognise the need to continually upgrade their skills through professional readings, personal research in the classroom and participation in workshops, courses and conferences.

(Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 57)

The programme commences in the first year of the College programme and continues into the second year. The year group is divided into three smaller groups. A staff member is in charge of each of these sub-groups, and is responsible for exposing the students in her group to strategies and techniques that are suitable and useful for teaching at a particular level of the primary school system. The three levels considered in this programme are the infants, the juniors, and the seniors. Trainees spend one term in a group and then switch to another group in the following term. In this way, all trainees are exposed to teaching methodologies for each of the three levels in the primary school.

PET is timetabled for 120 hours of in-College work (each session being 1.5 hours long) and 12 weeks of teaching practice. The in-College sessions focus on "general preparation" for teaching practice, but there seems to be some overlap between what is done in the PET programme and what is done by subject area specialists in preparing trainees to teach their particular subject. PET tutors also invite subject specialists to be a part of the PET programme from time to time, for example, when the groups are doing micro-teaching in a particular subject.

The level of co-ordination between preparation in the PET programme and the preparation by subject area specialists does not seem to be satisfactory. The rationale

behind preparing trainees for teaching practice through the subject areas (in addition to the PET programme) is that there are specific techniques that are appropriate for the subject areas that may not be available in a general preparatory programme. However, the net result of the different types of preparation seems to be some confusion in the minds of trainees. Some trainees have complained that they are sometimes required to prepare different types of lesson plans for the different areas, based on the preferences of the lecturers concerned.

The topics that are covered in PET include the following:

- Teaching strategies
- Unit planning
- Lesson planning
- Classroom management and organisation
- Making appropriate use of resources, for example, using recycled materials
- Teaching specific parts of the lesson, for example, the introduction
- Questioning techniques

A “PET Juniors” handbook exists. This outlines the PET programme as it applies to the junior level of the primary school in more detail. The strategies employed by tutors in the PET programme include whole group discussion and micro-teaching.

Teaching practice is conducted in three blocks during the two-year period. The block periods are arranged in three-week (2nd term), four-week (4th term), and five-week (6th term) sessions, to give a total of 12 weeks of teaching practice in primary schools. In preparation for teaching practice, trainees must develop a set of units to be taught to the primary school class to which they have been assigned for the period. Trainees must do background diagnostic work with the class and cooperating teacher before embarking on the preparation of their units. The units (with accompanying lesson plans) must be checked and signed by the subject specialists before the trainee goes into the field on teaching practice.

The Colleges are responsible for making arrangements for trainees to be assigned to schools for teaching practice. Trainees from Valsayn are assigned to schools in the northern part of the island. Attempts are made to send trainees to schools that are not too distant from their homes. The administration at Valsayn tries to assign trainees to schools in groups so as to maximise the use of the tutor’s time when he/she visits the schools. Trainees are even allowed to suggest the names of other trainees with whom they would like to work in a particular school. For the final teaching practice in the 6th term, attempts are made to use schools with low noise levels and an environment that is generally conducive to teaching and learning.

All lecturers from the College are involved in the supervision of trainees on teaching practice. Typically, a lecturer would be assigned 7-8 trainees distributed in 2-3 schools for a given teaching practice period. Lecturers are expected to visit trainees in their schools, listen to them teach, and generally help them to reflect on their efforts in the

attempt to become more proficient. These lecturers also award grades to the trainees at designated points.

The administrators at Valsayn have indicated that they experience some difficulties with the teaching practice exercise. Some of these difficulties are:

- There is no AV equipment available at the College for micro-teaching.
- Trainees do not serve well as “pupils” during micro-teaching exercises in the College.
- Some principals are unwilling to have trainees assigned to their schools for various reasons, with the result that some degree of difficulty is sometimes experienced in finding places for trainees.
- The Standard 5 (Common Entrance) class is never used whenever teaching practice is conducted before those students have taken the examination.
- Trainees do not like to work with the post-primary classes because of their perceived intellectual deficiencies.
- There is a high number of trainees living in certain areas, making placement in schools difficult in those areas.

During the first week of teaching practice, trainees are encouraged to return to the College to sort out any difficulties that they might be experiencing at that initial stage of the attachment.

2.1.2 Corinth Teachers' College

Trainees are required to fulfil a minimum of 12 weeks of practical teaching during the two years of training. This period is inclusive of the four weeks of final teaching practice. Corinth Teachers' College does not appear to have as structured a PET programme as Valsayn Teachers' College

During the first term, trainees engage in their **first practice** session. This session extends over three weeks and consists of two half-day teaching sessions; usually Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Different classes are taught on each of these two days. Trainees are divided into groups of six and are placed under the supervision of one lecturer. Some lecturers have responsibility for two such groups, which means that some of them will be out with students on both Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

For this first teaching practice, trainees are exposed to some of the methodological skills (e.g., questioning, set induction, using pupils' prior knowledge) in the PET programme as it is organised at Corinth. Subject area departments also equip trainees with some methodological skills. During the course of the PET programme, each subject area department is given a slot in which to present the methodology for teaching that particular subject area.

Before embarking on the first practice, trainees must seek permission from school principals at least three to four weeks prior to the start of the practice. Following this, the

first pair of trainees pay a preliminary visit about two weeks before the start of practice. This visit facilitates their meeting with the Principal, the cooperating teacher, and the pupils. During this visit, the trainees gather information about the lesson to be taught and any other information that might be relevant to its delivery. An information sheet is provided by the PET Department for this purpose.

At the College, periods are allotted on the timetable for pre-conferencing. At these sessions, trainees and supervisors critique a first draft of the lesson to be taught by the pair of trainees. Amendments are made and the other trainees take responsibility for other aspects of the planning (e.g., the preparation of resources). An assessment instrument, designed by staff at Corinth and used only at Corinth, is discussed since this is what will guide the other trainees in their observation and assessment of specific aspects of their peers' lesson. A teaching roster is made up for the remaining trainees so that each trainee in the group gets a chance to teach a lesson as part of a team of two. Supervisors, as well as subject lecturers, are available for any consultation subsequent to this planning session.

Prior to the actual delivery of the lesson, the trainees who would not be teaching select which aspects of that lesson they would like to observe. These areas are rotated over the three weeks. At the end of each lesson, a post-conferencing session is held either at the school itself or at the College. Each trainee is encouraged to share his/her comments, as objectively as possible, taking care to address both positive and negative issues arising out of the lesson. Trainees are also required to do a self-appraisal of their lessons. At this time as well, either before or after the lesson, the second pair of trainees meet with the facilitating teachers and the classes, to gather information for the lessons that they would teach.

Around the middle of the second term, trainees embark on their **second** (three-week) **practice**. At this time, the trainees can decide whether they wish to go out singly or in pairs. After schools are selected and permission is sought from the principals, trainees pay a preliminary visit about three to four weeks prior to the beginning of the practice. Approximately 12-17 trainees are assigned to a pair of supervisors. Sessions are not allocated on the timetable for conferencing with students but meetings are arranged at the convenience of both supervisors and students. Subject lecturers can also make an input in the planning of units. All units must be seen by supervisors before students proceed on practice. This means that each supervisor is expected to be knowledgeable about the entire primary school syllabus. Supervisors are expected to observe at least two lessons together. During this practice, trainees are required to teach five lessons per day. Post-conferencing is conducted at the end of every lesson. Trainees are encouraged to do a self-appraisal of each lesson.

The **third practice** takes place during the fourth term. This can either be a three- or four-week practice where students go out singly. The preparation for this practice is similar to the previous one.

The **final teaching practice** takes place during the sixth term. Here, again, the preparation is similar to the previous practices. Trainees are advised that they are required to teach a minimum of four lessons per day. During the first week of final practice, supervisors post-conference with trainees, after which feedback is reduced. Counselling forms a major part of this practice in particular, since students experience serious stress throughout the evaluation exercise.

2.2 The Teaching Practice Sites

Primary school buildings in Trinidad and Tobago are not uniform. At one end of the spectrum are those schools that are dilapidated and in need of serious repair work. These schools have little by way of amenities. At the other end of the spectrum are the schools which were built in the recent past with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank. These schools have separate rooms for the principal and the staff. They also have room for a science laboratory, although some of the schools have converted these rooms into regular classrooms in order to accommodate more pupils. In spite of these differences, one common feature in nearly all the schools is the open classroom. Typically, one class is divided from another by wooden screens or blackboards. In only few cases are there walls separating the various classrooms. In some schools, only a narrow corridor (and not even a blackboard) separates two classes.

The net result of such poor layout of the physical plant is that the noise level in these schools is quite high, as noise from activity in one class is readily augmented by noise from activity in nearby classes. This is the setting in which trainees are expected to learn their craft.

The school furniture in most schools is also less than desirable. Typically, three or four pupils sit at long, wooden, heavy benches which are a combination of a seat and a desk. These benches are usually packed closely together. This means that there is not much room within which the teacher can move during a lesson. It also means that teachers are limited in the extent to which they can manipulate class furniture to create different learning environments. However, in a few schools, there is enough space to facilitate the rearranging of furniture.

CHAPTER 3

TEACHING PRACTICE – FIRST ROUND

3.1 Procedure

The procedures and foci for the observation of teaching practice sessions were first discussed by all the researchers engaged in the work. Thereafter, researchers operated independently in the field but the dialogue among researchers continued whenever interesting events were experienced. Three researchers monitored the teaching practice activities of first-year trainees from Valsayn Teachers' College during the period February to March 1999. In all, 43 lessons were observed, involving over 30 trainees and 7 supervisors. Two researchers monitored the practice teaching activities at Corinth. Because of logistical problems, only 12 lessons were observed, involving 8 trainees and 4 supervisors. The lessons covered the full range of subjects offered at the primary level.

The classes observed were made up of roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. Class sizes ranged from 12 pupils to 35 pupils.

3.2 The Climate in the Receiving Schools

The principal and staff in the primary schools were generally very accommodating to the researchers. Every effort was made to ensure that the researchers were physically comfortable. All trainees were able to teach their classes when the supervisor (and researcher) visited. In some instances, principals adjusted the time of class periods to facilitate the supervision process. In spite of these courtesies, though, some principals had reservations about their continued participation in the practice teaching exercise. The main problem seemed to be related to the logistics of accommodating trainees, with sometimes limited classroom management skills, within an existing school programme. The term "disruption" was used by one principal to describe how he viewed the impact of the trainees' teaching programme in his school.

3.3 Trainees' View of Their Role and Function in the Teaching Practice Exercise

Many trainees came to the first teaching practice session with concerns that they had not been adequately prepared. One area of insecurity was the planning of units and lessons. As one trainee said:

You're preparing units and you don't know what to write. Don't talk about the lesson plans. The lesson plans were the worst because I never wrote a lesson plan and most of the subjects don't really tell you how to.

One trainee even indicated that she prepared her lessons by referring to a few books and getting help from her mother who is a teacher.

Others came with doubts about their ability to interact well with their pupils. One cooperating teacher reported of the trainee assigned to her classroom:

And he was so nervous! He was afraid of taking on Infants Year class... He thought he would never be able to work with them, you know. He say, Miss, I don't know where to start with them.

Nevertheless, most of them seemed to be determined to try their best, in spite of their perceived lack of preparation for the task. One trainee philosophised: "We cannot predict the outcome of these lessons; we can plan for the best and learn from our mistakes."

Trainees were generally interested in doing things to please the supervisor. This is a daunting task since different supervisors are known to have differing expectations of trainees. One trainee described some of the difficulties involved:

I was really there fishing around and trying and thinking whether my idea was good, thinking Miss Brown (supervisor) might not like it. Miss Brown is a professional and likes a lot of things, so that had me really scared. I was thinking that I would not be able to come up to par and impress these people who were coming to hear me.

One cooperating teacher supplied corroborating evidence with respect to the differing expectations of supervisors when she explained:

It is not a constant thing in that everybody wants to see the same thing, so it might be a little puzzling for them (trainees).

Some trainees also expressed awareness that they could be seen as potentially intrusive in the classrooms of cooperating teachers to whom they were assigned. At one school, the trainee teacher said that she was more appreciative of her cooperating teacher's help because she recognised that when she is there, "the teacher has to leave her programme unattended." This understanding was not without foundation, as cooperating teachers in different schools also expressed the belief that the presence of the student teacher meant that the planned programme of work could be kept back, and that, at best, the trainee's contribution would be no more than, as one cooperating teacher expressed it, "the icing on the cake."

3.4 Content Knowledge of Trainees

The range of lessons observed included language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, physical education, and family life education. Most of the student teachers observed demonstrated adequate knowledge of fundamental concepts pertinent to the subject and for the level taught. However, there were some content areas that presented some difficulty. One trainee experienced some difficulty with the concept of a plot (of a story), while another trainee could not explain to her science class why a plastic fork

didn't float. Yet another trainee, in a lesson on synonyms, focused on the word "get" for which synonyms were to be chosen. This proved to be quite challenging for the Standard 2 class being taught. One of the trainees talked about "pieces" of a fraction. Another trainee asked her class: "How many parts in a quarter?" This created some confusion and pupils were unable to respond. In some social studies classes, conceptual difficulties were noted with regard to concepts such as "continents," "bodies of water," and "government."

While trainees displayed an adequate knowledge of content, they were often unable to articulate connections to previous knowledge or other areas of knowledge very readily. Thus, the concept of a quarter was limited to what was possible with the teaching-learning aids accumulated and used in the lesson. Similarly, the activity of making predictions in a science class was limited to what was observable in the pictures presented.

3.5 General Pedagogic Knowledge

It is evident that trainees had received some instruction with respect to general pedagogic skills, particularly pertaining to the affective domain. Nearly all trainees interacted comfortably with their pupils. Pupils were given words of encouragement for their efforts and the entire class was often asked to applaud when something was well done. Not all trainees were able to handle incorrect responses from pupils appropriately - while some trainees were careful not to be negative or derogatory when incorrect responses were given, others simply moved on to another pupil without dealing with the pupil who had given the incorrect response. Trainees often did not seem to be able to use incorrect responses as launching pads for enhancing the teaching/learning process.

In nearly all the classes observed, trainees attempted to engage their pupils and reinforce concepts through questioning. Most questions asked were closed questions and there were some instances where the trainee was engaged in the activity "guess what is in the teacher's head," that is, accepting only certain specific responses from pupils as being correct. In some instances, questions were directed to particular pupils but in other cases, questions were directed to no one in particular. Some trainees recognised their shortcomings in this area, as exemplified by the comment by one trainee: "In future, I would prepare lists of questions to assist me in the process of encouraging predictions."

All trainees used some form of resource materials in their lessons. These materials were provided at the trainees' expense. They provided charts, cut-outs, pictures, simple teacher-made apparatus for teaching science, fraction strips, and so on. Charts created on newsprint were the most common resource used. Resource materials were always in sufficient supply. Some degree of creativity was displayed by some trainees, for example, in the construction of a real-life shoe by one male trainee; this was used as a stimulus to help pupils in an Infant classroom to determine whether the shoe lace could be "long" or "short" - the teaching point of the lesson. There was some degree of enthusiasm about the use of resources in teaching. As one trainee put it (in the vernacular): "When I get resources so, though, eh, I does get so excited, and I want to bring it for them!"

The aspects of general pedagogic practice which seemed to challenge trainees most seemed to be connected to those aspects of classroom experience which are less predictable, and which demand responsiveness to the ongoing dynamics of classroom exchanges. Three vignettes can be used to illustrate this point:

- Miss D. is stymied when pupils do not respond as she predicted to the material provided for the evaluation of the lesson. The pupils misinterpret the demands of the question posed and she is unable to deal with this. She goes to the cooperating teacher to ask what she should do.
- Miss O., faced with the plastic fork that would not float as she expected, responds with panic: “Oh Lord!” She later recovers and asks the class to think of possible explanations for what happened and to bring these to the next class.
- Mr. D., having been told by the supervisor that he needs to do more to make the concepts “long” and “short” clearer to the pupils, panics. The class ends in disarray with the cooperating teacher having to intervene to keep order.

The attitude to authority varied among the classrooms observed and this had implications for the classroom management process. Pupils in some schools were fairly docile, responding obediently with: “Yes, Miss” or “No, Sir.” In other schools, classroom management was a challenge for trainees. One cooperating teacher indicated that a trainee had been moved to tears on one occasion when she experienced difficulty in controlling the class. Some trainees openly admitted that they depended on the presence of the cooperating teacher to maintain order. When activities were varied and interesting, the problem was sometimes minimised. This was not always the case, though, as one trainee found out. In order to regain his pupils’ attention, this trainee had to collect all the plasticine with which the pupils had been working. A few boys managed to save a few pieces of plasticine and played with them throughout the rest of the lesson!

Whole group, teacher-centred strategies were used by most of the trainees. Even when pupils were put into small groups to work, such activities were allowed to run for relatively short periods of time before the trainee resumed the teacher-centred role. There were a few instances, though, where the trainee set small groups (or individuals) a task and allowed them to work on the task on their own for some time. In such cases, the trainee acted as a facilitator as the pupils worked. One trainee who used this latter strategy was doing Art and Craft with a group of 12 Standard 2 students (6 boys and 6 girls) in a very cramped classroom setting. As the pupils worked, she managed to move around the small space, questioning them individually, and getting them to solve any problems they were experiencing. She even used one of the pupils to demonstrate the technique again to the whole class to help other pupils who were experiencing difficulty. In addition, she assigned more able pupils to help other pupils who were less advanced.

3.6 Pedagogic Content Knowledge

Lack of understanding of how to teach for concept development was a weakness displayed by many trainees. Trainees seemed to experience great difficulty in developing concepts in a manner that would allow for easy acquisition by pupils, while at the same time pacing the lesson appropriately and involving the pupils actively in the learning process.

Sometimes, the lesson was conducted at too fast a pace. For example, the trainee would present one piece of stimulus material after the other without allowing pupils time to internalise the concepts that constituted the teaching point. Typically, in such settings, the pupils were not asked to record anything in their books with the result that, at the end of the class, pupils had little to which to refer for the purposes of review. The flip side to this was that trainees might stay so long with one issue that the teaching process halted for a while as some pupils became bored. One trainee, for example, repeated the definition of a word, and had pupils repeat the definition over and over again even though it was clear that pupils had acquired the concept.

The dilemmas faced by trainees in teaching for concept development can be further exemplified by reference to a mathematics lesson on the net of cuboids. The classroom was arranged for group activity with desks turned so that there were five groups with pupils facing each other. Each group was given a box with sides of varying sizes. The objective of the lesson was that pupils would be able to state the characteristics of the net of a cuboid and come up with a definition of same. The trainee then used questioning strategies to elicit from pupils a name for the shape of the box before it was cut open and after it was cut open and laid flat. Whenever an answer was given, it was written on the board; there was no discussion on the appropriateness of the answer. If there was no answer, the trainee simply asked another question. The following is an example of some of the questions asked, and answers received:

- Trainee:** What is the new shape formed when the box is dismantled?
Pupil: Six rectangles (Written on the board)
Trainee: What is the formula for the area of a rectangle?
Pupil: (After a long pause..) Length by breadth (Written on board)
Trainee: To find the new shape, what do we do?
Pupils: (No response)
Trainee: If you had to measure the distance round each shape, how would you do that?
Pupil: Add around the edges.
Trainee: Yes. What is the correct name for the new shape that you found?
Pupils: Like a plane. Like a T-square.

The trainee then put up a chart with the definition of the net of a cuboid, and asked the pupils to read the chart. From all appearances, the group arrangement served the purpose of having pupils share the resources, but little else. There was no evidence that pupils had learnt anything about the net of a cuboid.

Trainees often used aids to teach concepts, especially in mathematics. Sometimes, in spite of the use of these resources, concept development was not achieved, and trainees did not seem to know what else they could do. For example, in one Standard 3 class, the process of deriving the formula for the perimeter of a rectangle proved to be difficult for pupils, even after all the practical work had been done. In her attempt to correct this situation, the trainee simply asked pupils to repeat the formula again and again. In a similar vein, a trainee doing a social studies class experienced some difficulty in getting the pupils to locate positions of places on a map, using lines of latitude and longitude. Her corrective measure was to keep reviewing the steps exactly as she had done before.

Inappropriate strategies were sometimes used for concept development. One female teacher of a first year Infant class tried to get two pupils to act out the story of the lion and the mouse while she read the story from a book. As she read, she inserted her own interpretations of what was happening. The pupils found it difficult to follow this presentation format and some of them became restless. In the end, when the trainee asked the class to tell her what was the first thing that happened in the story, a pupil promptly told her: "Go it over again."

3.7 Participation of Pupils

The participation of pupils in the lessons observed was generally high. Most of the pupils were engaged on task most of the time, but there were nearly always a few in each class who were inattentive. Some trainees were able to use questioning strategies to involve some of these inattentive pupils in the lesson, but other trainees seemed oblivious of the fact that these pupils were not paying attention. Generally, pupils were treated with dignity by trainees and they responded well to the trainees' initiatives. It was striking that, in a few of the classes observed, there were a couple of pupils (boys mainly) who were sucking their fingers. This occurred, not only at the lower levels, but even at the post-primary level.

Pupils' engagement in the lesson must be differentiated from "time on task." The former requires mental engagement ("minds-on" activity) whereas the latter refers to the involvement in instructional activities ("hands-on"). Pupils were often engaged in "hands-on" activities, but, as mentioned previously, the "minds-on" activity necessary for proper concept acquisition was not always obvious.

At least two cooperating teachers interviewed indicated that pupils came to the classes of these trainee teachers with high expectations of "novelty" elements in the lesson. They would get name tags, there would be dramatic elements in the lesson, gold stars and other rewards would be handed out. "The lesson must be animated," one cooperating teacher suggested, and he commented that, when this does not happen, the pupils

... find, something wrong here. This classroom is not interesting enough. Then, ahem, they begin to get a little bit rowdy and so on.

He noted that pupils may respond in this way, even when their classes with their regular teachers are mainly “chalk and talk.”

Typically, towards the end of a lesson, pupils were asked to do some type of exercise in their copy books or on a worksheet. These would then be collected by the trainee (as pupils completed them) who would begin to mark them during the lesson if time permitted. There were few instances where an evaluation of pupils’ performance was conducted during the lesson itself; presumably, such feedback was given in subsequent lessons.

3.8 The Role of the Cooperating Teacher

Cooperating teachers defined their roles differently and interacted differently with trainees from classroom to classroom. Some saw their role as facilitators, although some defined this role simply as making it possible for trainees to deliver lessons as they had planned them. One cooperating teacher defined her role in this way:

All I tell them is that we have certain topics that we have covered. I expect my work to be done. I am not going to come out and tell you that it should be done this way.

Others saw themselves as guides and assistants in smoothing over rough spots:

As a cooperating teacher, I see my role is to assist Joanne (the trainee) by telling her the level of the pupils, their standards, assisting her if she has any problems dealing with the children, just being there if she needs my help, generally.

Most indicated that they would point out flaws in the delivery of the lesson, more or less overtly, for example: “At the end of each lesson, what I would normally do is tell her what I think should have been done.”

In one extreme case, a cooperating teacher who felt that a lesson had been inadequately delivered, taught the entire lesson over again, to show the trainee what she felt should have been done. Many, however, indicated that they remembered their own insecurities as trainees, and tried to deliver their criticisms in ways that would not make the trainee feel worse. In only one case did a cooperating teacher define his role as being partly a collaborator with the trainee, both in planning individual lessons, and, generally, in managing the whole practice teaching exercise:

*We know it’s going to be hectic. You know its going to be a lot of time-consuming work and so on. We know it’s going to be a lot of stress on **either** side, so we try to make it as comfortable as possible.*

He added that, both in preparing a lesson, and at the end of it, “we could sit down and beat out a topic and we could get a better idea of it.”

During actual teaching sessions, the cooperating teachers also displayed different levels of participation. Some cooperating teachers were absent for the teaching practice sessions; some stood around on the fringes of the classroom and, through eye contact and facial expressions, helped to maintain discipline; others played a minor role by handing out materials to pupils when instructed to by the trainee. It also seemed that some cooperating teachers were anxious that the trainee should do a good job since they seemed to be empathizing and giving hints from the sidelines.

Not surprisingly, trainees had varying views about the role played by their cooperating teacher. The trainees reported levels of interaction that ranged from no help at all to the display of genuine interest in the trainee's work and the giving of quality feedback and advice. One trainee who was grateful for the help given by her cooperating teacher described their relationship as follows:

I teach by myself. At the end she might say, 'You should have done this. This would have been more appropriate, but the lesson was quite a good lesson. You need to polish up on this.' But, she is very helpful. Even before, she would ask me what I was going to teach today. She would ask me how I was going to teach it. Depending on how much time she has, she would ask me and I would explain to her and she would say, 'Okay.'

Other trainees were not as fortunate and some were unhappy about the lack of support from the cooperating teacher. One trainee, who depended on the cooperating teacher for the maintenance of order in the classroom, was quite disappointed that she received little help with her lessons from this cooperating teacher:

When she is not there, I have some trouble controlling some (pupils) – not all. Even when most of the class would be engaged in what might be for most an interesting task, one or two would give trouble... She should be there. Before the lesson, we should discuss it and after the lesson... she should give me feedback. Most of the time I don't get any and I think she should tell me whether it was good and where I needed help and stuff like that.

In terms of their role in evaluating individual trainees, some cooperating teachers indicated that, at the outset of the practice teaching exercise, they had made notes, but stopped when they realised that they were not being asked for their notes. In only one school did cooperating teachers indicate that they had been asked by the supervisor of the trainee teachers assigned to that school how they would evaluate the trainees. The principal of that school said that, since he had been principal, that was his first experience of collaboration between supervisors of the College concerned and staff at this practice teaching site:

He (the College supervisor) made us feel our school was not being used, then. Our school was being made part of a bigger, global thing... Before, I never felt like that.

3.9 Post-Lesson Conferencing Sessions

The supervising lecturers displayed different approaches to the post-lesson conferencing sessions. All supervisors found something positive to say about the lesson. About half of the supervisors adopted a technical rationality approach in the post-conference, focusing on the elements of the lesson – the objectives, the type of strategies used, the evaluation, and the closure. A lot of time was spent by these lecturers on discussion of the effective use of resources, use of the blackboard, the clarity of charts, and so on. Typically, these discussions would begin with the supervisor asking the trainee to give his/her views of the lesson. After a few short sentences from the trainee, the supervisor would literally take over, pointing out how the lesson could be improved in the areas mentioned above.

This approach by these supervising lecturers fits well with the focus of PET as outlined in the syllabus document and other supplementary materials. It also indicates that these lecturers are faithfully following the instrument that is supposed to be used for assessing trainees on teaching practice (See Appendix).

Other supervising lecturers, though, had more interactive sessions. They spent more time trying to find out what the particular trainee was trying to do in the lesson and why he/she felt it was important. In a couple of instances, it seemed that the lecturers concerned had particular orientations (for example, a leaning towards the use of dramatic episodes in the lesson) and tried to encourage the trainees to adopt these orientations.

It would be interesting to see if the trainees in later practices, gradually come to reflect for themselves about the criteria of effective instruction. In this first practice teaching session, trainees seemed to be extremely focused on the supervisor's definition of good practice, and did not seem to be seeing good practice as responsiveness to the context and classroom dynamics.

In one instance, a supervisor also seemed to define his role as being to help trainees to fit into the climate of the school to which they had been assigned for practice teaching. This supervisor had indicated in an interview, that, in his vision of the practice teaching process, the student teacher should “become part of the school and really understand what it is to be a teacher in a school.”

He attempted to help his teachers to fit into the school in two ways. First, he advised the trainees as to how they might behave in order to win the cooperation of school personnel: “I tell them, ‘Be humble. Ask their advice.’” In addition, he himself appears to have consciously followed this principle in establishing his own relationship with the principal and teachers of the school to which one group of his trainees was assigned. The principal of this school in describing how this supervisor interacted with school staff, commented:

He would ask you things. He would say, ‘Do you think what I am doing is right? Do you think in my comments to the teachers I am fair?’ I have never found that before. I have never found that – he was so humble!

3.10 Summary

The practice teaching exercise is considered by both College staff and trainees to be one of the most important parts of the curriculum delivered to trainee teachers. As one teacher educator put it:

And teacher training to me, the final important factor is your going out there and being able to teach effectively. If you have 10 distinctions but you cannot teach the Infant class or the Junior class or the Senior class that you are attached to, the principal will want to know what we are doing at Valsayn.

Yet, data from the first teaching practice round suggested that a number of factors detract from the effectiveness of teaching practice in preparing teachers for the real world of the classroom. These limitations of the programme include the following:

1. Insufficient coordination of activities between specialist lecturers and lecturers in the PET programme results in disjunctures in instruction given to trainees, and sometimes causes confusion in the minds of these trainees.
2. Inadequate formal communication mechanisms exist to facilitate a process by which the schools which host the trainees are made an effective part of the training programme. Schools often do not perceive themselves as being made an integral part of the process. This may lead, in some cases, to their level of participation being limited to simply having the trainees in their classrooms. Even in those cases where schools feel actively involved, adequate feedback mechanisms do not exist to provide the Colleges with a constant source of reliable information about how the trainees function within host schools.
3. The actual practice sites – the schools – provide the trainees with widely varying experiences. All trainees may not have adequate opportunities to practise strategies and skills to which they have been introduced in the programme. Physical conditions range from excellent to poor; cooperating teachers may be involved or detached, helpful or less than helpful. Schools may integrate trainees into their communities to a greater or lesser extent. Hence, trainees may profit more or less from their training experience, based on factors which are extraneous to both the Colleges' curriculum and to their own abilities and understandings.
4. Trainees often come to the practice teaching experience feeling insecure about their ability to plan units and lessons adequately, and many seem to be inadequately prepared to deal with certain pedagogical tasks such as teaching for conceptual understanding and questioning pupils to encourage higher-order thinking. Some trainees were also unclear about some aspects of subject matter content.
5. The consciousness of trainees that they are being assessed from the first practice teaching session appears to lead them to be highly sensitive to the expectations of their supervisors, whose idiosyncratic understandings of what constitutes "good teaching practice" play a significant role in shaping trainees' strategies and reactions

in the classroom. This may, to some extent, diminish their ability to be responsive to the dynamics of the lesson as it progresses, and of the classroom. This is especially likely in situations where supervisors define their own roles primarily as directing trainees and transmitting knowledge, rather than as collaborating with them in constructing meaning about what teaching entails. Hence, a transmission pedagogical model may be given a higher value in the hidden curriculum, even if transactional models (i.e., inquiry and problem-based approaches) and transformational models (i.e., approaches which require trainees to develop their own understandings of how to be responsive to classroom dynamics) are encouraged in the explicit curriculum.

6. The constraints imposed by the timing of practice teaching sessions and by the time needed by trainees to fulfil the required number of practice sessions, often impose a sense of strain on cooperating teachers who feel that their own work is kept back, and that their (own) students' progress is retarded as a result. This, in turn, affects the willingness of teachers to act as cooperating teachers for this exercise.

In spite of the difficulties and shortcomings identified, however, observation of actual classroom experiences suggests that many trainees, even by the end of the first practice session, demonstrate adequate knowledge of the course content in the various subject areas of the primary school curriculum. Other achievements noted were as follows:

1. Trainees were able to establish a good rapport with their pupils and interacted comfortably with them. Generally, trainees were also able to establish a certain level of interaction within their classrooms, and to select and practise classroom management strategies to promote such interaction.
2. All trainees seemed very aware of the importance of selecting and developing stimulating resource materials, and, in some cases, trainees invested a considerable amount of planning time in accessing and developing such materials.
3. Cooperating teachers sometimes expressed a sense that they learned, or were reminded of, alternative approaches to instruction by watching some of the trainees carrying out the practice teaching exercise; some indicated that they wanted to use these approaches in their own practice in the future.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING PRACTICE – SECOND ROUND

4.1 Procedure

Four researchers were engaged in this aspect of the work during the period October-November, 1999. In all, teaching practice sessions were observed at 14 schools. Seven of these schools hosted trainee teachers from Corinth Teachers' Training College while the other seven schools hosted trainees from Valsayn. Eight supervisors were involved in this second round of the research; of these, 7 had been involved in the first round. Altogether, 38 trainees were observed, 20 from Corinth and 18 from Valsayn. Of the trainees observed during the second round, three, at Corinth, had also been observed during the first round. All the other trainees were being observed for the first time by the researchers. This situation existed because, typically, trainees are seldom assigned to the same supervisor in the second round of teaching practice as in the first round.

The classes observed were similar in composition to those observed in the first round. Class sizes ranged from 15 pupils to 35 pupils, with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls.

The breakdown of the lessons observed was as follows: Language Arts/Literature – 13, Mathematics – 9; Science - 3; Social Studies – 6; Art and Craft – 5; Agricultural Science - 3; Physical Education - 0; Family Life Education – 2.

Nineteen cooperating teachers were interviewed, 10 from schools hosting Corinth trainees and the other 9 from schools hosting trainees from Valsayn. Recorded interviews were conducted with 17 trainees, 5 at Corinth and 12 at Valsayn. Interviews were also conducted with two Principals and one Vice Principal of schools hosting Corinth trainees, and with Principals of two schools hosting Valsayn trainees. Post-conferencing sessions were observed, and notes taken on these sessions, at all schools, but only 10 were recorded

In addition to looking at the overall performance of trainees in the second round of teaching practice, an analysis was also done of their teaching of three core subject areas in the primary school curriculum, namely, language arts, science, and mathematics.

4.2 The Role of Principals

Principals continued to play a significant role in determining the quality of the teaching practice experience. All of the principals interviewed indicated that they were happy to have trainees in their schools, and that they would be willing to continue doing so. Some principals even saw themselves as contributing, through facilitating the teaching practice

sessions, to enhancing the overall standard of education in the country. Most expressed empathy with the trainees' experience, and recognised how stressful the situation could be, and how much was demanded of the trainees. They saw their role as being to establish an environment in which the teaching practice sessions would be productive of good learning experiences for the trainees. Different principals defined this as keeping their schools quiet, and ensuring that pupils and staff cooperated in the experience. In some cases, principals went so far as to allow special arrangements, that went against normal school practice, to ensure that trainees were accommodated. For example, in some schools, noisy classes were moved away from areas where trainees were teaching when these trainees were being observed by their supervisors. In another case, the principal allowed the ringing of the lunch bell to be delayed so that a trainee who had gone over time could be allowed to finish the lesson he had planned. Some principals even indicated that they offered inputs into the process of planning and delivering instruction, requesting to see trainees' notes and making suggestions, or commenting on the delivery of lessons that they had stopped to observe.

Some principals also indicated that they saw the teaching practice sessions as opportunities for their own staff, and for themselves, to be introduced to new strategies and approaches, and to acquire some of the resource materials prepared by trainees.

Nearly all of the principals, however, were vague as to what the Training Colleges hoped would be achieved by the teaching practice. Several indicated a wish for more communication with the Colleges, and more information as to what exactly was expected from the school and the trainees during the teaching practice. This wish was echoed by some supervisors from Valsayn Teachers College, who felt that more formal lines of communication needed to be established between Colleges and host schools.

4.3 Content Knowledge of Trainees

Many trainee teachers observed were more confident in their knowledge of content in the various subject areas taught during this second round. Trainees did, however, demonstrate instances of uncertainty. In one instance, the subtleties of language escaped a trainee teaching a Language Arts class. During a lesson on antonyms, the trainee teacher wrote on the board, "The boy jumped *over* the table." When a pupil supplied, "The boy jumped *under* the table" the teacher took the antonym as being correct but made no comment about the fact that one does not normally talk about *jumping* under a table (It should be noted that a lecturer at one of the Teachers' Colleges may have accounted for this sort of problem, to some extent, when he pointed out that even at this stage of the programme many of these trainees continue to have very basic difficulties with English for their own everyday functioning).

Trainees' understanding of concepts related to instruction in different subject areas also showed occasional lapses. One trainee, for instance, confused the concept of a "story grammar" with that of grammar in the sense in which it is more traditionally used. Topics in mathematics and science continued to be challenging for trainees. Generally,

though, trainees handled the subject matter content reasonably well in the lessons observed.

4.4 General Pedagogic Knowledge

Trainees generally showed more confidence in selecting a range of strategies to structure lessons so as to facilitate learning. In fact, trainees indicated that one of the primary benefits they felt themselves to have acquired from the Teachers' College experience up to this point was their increased repertoire of strategies. More trainees could now be observed modeling skills and strategies for pupils, using small group as well as whole-group activities, drama, role-play, and charts which could be filled in as lessons progressed.

While they demonstrated a greater awareness of the strategies and were more willing to use them, however, not all were equally successful in managing their classes or their time when they attempted to use these strategies. Instructions to the pupils were not always clear and, often, pupils clearly had little prior experience with these approaches; as a result, instead of going to work on assigned tasks, some pupils took the opportunity to play games or to socialise with their classmates.

Other trainees continued to use more traditional whole-group, teacher-directed activities. Even these trainees, however, understood as a general principle that pupil participation in their learning process was a desirable thing. To encourage such participation, some resorted to rapid and frequent questioning of pupils to elicit responses to aspects of the lesson.

It should be noted that in instances where the trainees used a limited repertoire of strategies, some of these trainees later indicated that this was a choice determined by conditions originating in the schools. In some instances, the physical closeness, crowded conditions, and the absence of partitions meant that interactive sessions, and anything else that could possibly be distracting to pupils in nearby classes, were actively discouraged by principals and cooperating teachers. In such cases, trainees received significantly different understandings about appropriate pedagogical strategies from the schools and from the Colleges. For instance, one trainee later indicated that he and his fellow trainees had been made to understand in their host school that activity-based approaches would be unwelcome. The principal of this school, according to this trainee, "...said that having children clap out work and do activities and thing is making noise. [...] So he likes a quiet environment, so we were not allowed to really express ourselves the way we really wanted." While trainees often understood that these were special conditions, some trainees felt that they were hampered in their ability to practise strategies and approaches encouraged by their Colleges, and worried that this would impact negatively on how they were assessed in the long term.

In some instances, although the lessons observed were conducted in a reasonably competent and confident manner, it later emerged, in interviews with cooperating

teachers and with their supervisors, that the trainees had expressed their lack of confidence about teaching at particular levels of the school. In interviews, some trainees also revealed that their confidence in teaching extended only to year groups with which they had had experience in primary schools before coming to the College. They felt that up to this point in their training, not enough time had been spent teaching them strategies designed to meet the special requirements of different age groups.

Some trainees demonstrated continuing problems with time management, and with planning how much could reasonably be taught in a single session. One lesson that was scheduled to last 35 minutes went on for 55 minutes, and the supervisor later indicated that this student habitually went significantly over time. In another case, a trainee observed asking a number of irrelevant questions during a lesson explained, during the post-teaching conferencing, that she did this, “to make up time.” She said that she had planned to teach for 30 minutes, but that the lesson as she planned it was actually delivered in 15 minutes.

Trainees’ ability to deal with contingencies that arose as part of the dynamics of classroom situations continued to be uneven. In one Standard 3 social studies class, for example, a trainee teacher who was using a whole group discussion to explore the concept of illegal drugs and their effects on the body, was informed by one pupil that her own brother sold drugs. The trainee continued to probe for more details, apparently oblivious to the potential dangers of this line of questioning. Another trainee when interviewed admitted that because she knew she couldn’t deal with some of the unexpected responses and behaviours of pupils, she would sit with her cooperating teacher when she knew her supervisor was coming, and try to anticipate the things the pupils might do or say.

Procedures for evaluation and closure seemed to be a particular source of confusion in the minds of trainees. Evaluation, for some trainees, took the form of an assigned exercise at the very end of the class, and the promise that it would be corrected later. Other trainees who used questioning at the end of instruction to determine what pupils had learned, and who found that pupils replied incorrectly, did not always probe to find out the source of the pupils’ confusion. Instead, some of them exhorted the pupils to “work harder next time” or to “try to do better.” Closure was still limited, by a few trainees, to thanking pupils for their participation and good behaviour during the lesson.

Resources continued to be a prime focus of trainees’ efforts, and some enlisted their cooperating teachers’ support in finding resources. What did shift, in this round, was that more trainees now appeared to understand that the resources were not to be a prop, but constituted a way of facilitating learning. In the words of one trainee, “without that, the pupils wouldn’t really be able to understand, if they don’t have things to manipulate...I mean, the children need to actually see it and to hold it and to look at it, and to measure it.” Otherwise, “they sit down there, and they say, ‘Yes Miss, that is true,’ and they don’t have *any* idea what you are talking about.”

For other trainees, however, the resources had begun to be seen as something of an imposition, and they questioned the emphasis they felt was being placed upon resources by supervisors. Although they acknowledged that the resources were important, one trainee commented, "Supervisors feel objectives are not met if you are not flooded with resources. Then, they will say, 'Good lesson.'" It should be noted that the supervisors themselves often stated that they felt that the trainees placed an undue emphasis and reliance on their resources to carry the lesson, so it would seem that there is some failure to communicate on this issue. For some trainees, the need for resources was also seen as constituting an additional financial burden where they were already having financial difficulties.

The absence of partitions in some schools proved an additional challenge to trainees, who were left with no place to display the resource materials they had so painstakingly prepared. Given the importance that they attached to these resources, some trainees commented that they found this disturbing.

Class control continued to be a challenge for many trainees teaching young children, or embarking for the first time on student-centred approaches. One trainee confided that he kept sweets which he promised to the infants if they would behave well. Other trainees were seen promising restless classes that, if they did their work well, they would be allowed to go out in a little while to play.

4.5 Pedagogic Content Knowledge

Trainees' command of pedagogic content knowledge was also uneven. In one instance, a trainee who was teaching the concepts of "living" and "nonliving" things, agreed with pupils that one characteristic of living things was that "they move." Children then pointed to cars and trucks, which had been identified in an earlier stage of the discussion as non-living things, and pointed out that they too moved. The trainee modified her original statement to say that living things moved "by themselves," whereupon other pupils pointed out to Miss that "a cloud moves by itself," and so did a ball (the pictures of which had also been placed on the board, under the category non-living things). The trainee seemed unclear how to extricate herself from the situation that had arisen, and resorted to telling the pupils that these were, nonetheless, non-living things, and moving on to an evaluation exercise.

In another case, a trainee conducting a mathematics class attempted to teach verification and estimation, working on the assumption that pupils would remember the concept of estimation which had been taught some time before in a social studies class. She introduced the terms estimation and verification on the pupils' worksheets, without referring to what had been done previously in the social studies class, and gave them numerous resources to facilitate an activity which would help them to use the concepts. The pupils, totally bewildered, played with the resources and with each other. It later became necessary for the supervisor to explain to the trainee how she might have made the concepts more intelligible to the pupils.

4.6 Participation of Pupils

In many of the classes observed, pupil participation was of a high standard. Pupils usually seemed eager to go along with the attempts of the trainees to involve them in class activities, or to respond to questions. Trainees themselves admitted that the pupils usually did attempt to support them in cases where they were being observed by their supervisors. In cases where lessons were well structured, pupils could be seen to be engrossed in the activities, and to be following keenly. In other, less successful classes, however, pupils went along, but demonstrated some level of uncertainty as to exactly what they were meant to be doing. In the cases where trainees attempted to use small- group techniques, but had not fully mastered these techniques, pupil participation degenerated into unproductive socialising or, in a few cases, into actual chaos, as pupils used the opportunity to play with resources.

4.7 Performance in Language Arts Classes

Thirteen language arts/literature classes were observed. A brief summary of these 13 lessons is shown in Table 1.

Table 4.1: Summary of the 13 Language Arts Lessons Observed

Class	Nature of lesson taught
1 st year Infants*	Reading - the Language Experience Approach
1 st year Infants	Creative writing based on a picture of a market scene
2 nd year Infants	Reading – word recognition
2 nd year Infants	The “oa” digraph. Sounds of words containing the digraph
Standard 1	Grammar – forming the past tense of verbs by doubling the last consonant before adding “ed”
Standard 1	Giving the meanings of words in context; substituting words in sentences; writing sentences with given words
Standard 2	Operational definitions for transitive and intransitive verbs (“Is there an object?”)
Standard 2	Story telling. Analysis of characters in the story
Standard 2	Letter writing – writing a friendly letter
Standard 2	Creative writing. Writing about a favourite character
Standard 3*	Strategies for comprehending texts
Standard 3*	Establishing the correct sequence of events in a story

The three lessons marked with an asterisk are described in detail below. Of these three language arts classes, one was based on a Language Experience Approach to reading and was taught to a Year I Infants class. One, intended to help pupils develop strategies for comprehending texts, was taught to a Standard 3 class. The final lesson reported on was taught to a Standard 3 class and entailed teaching pupils to establish the correct sequence

of events in a story. All three classes employed whole-group approaches, with differing degrees of success in teaching the identified concepts and strategies. The detailed analyses of these classes follow.

4.7.1 A language experience approach

This trainee demonstrated a reasonably good understanding of the approach. He was able to use the pupils' own interests and experiences to facilitate their understanding of the text they were asked to read. He spent the first minute of the class asking pupils about the kinds of sports they liked, and used this as a springboard to introduce his stimulus material, a picture of men playing cricket. Some discussion of the picture, prompted by his asking the class questions about what they were seeing, managed to elicit pupils' use of many of the words which would be introduced in the text they were asked to read.

Pupils' interest in the subject matter presented in the picture ensured that they were willing to discuss it, and his questioning techniques were successful in eliciting pupil responses. Two areas where he experienced some difficulty were, first, when the young children, seeing clouds in the picture, (although they were silver clouds in a blue sky) said in response to a question about the kind of day it was, that it was "cloudy." This was disconcerting for the trainee, largely because instead of letting the pupils' discussion generate text for the lesson, he had previously developed a text based on their predicted responses. When, therefore, they responded with unexpected responses, this created a difficulty, since the text he had prepared spoke of it being a sunny, rather than a cloudy day. Similarly, they indicated that they "love" cricket. He had prepared a text based on the assumption that they would "like it." Later, when he asked them to read the text that should have been familiar if they had generated it themselves, pupils ran into difficulties with the second word, which he, and not they, had generated.

He managed to use re-directing questions to prompt their generating a text more in line with the one he had prepared, and later, when one pupil made an error in identifying the word "like," he was able to reestablish a discussion which created a context within which the pupil could identify a possible meaning of the word. He was also able to maintain class involvement in the lesson. Pupils were eager to volunteer to read the strips of text he placed on the board, and were all able to identify words selected for particular attention. The trainee used peer correction to alert the pupil who incorrectly identified the word 'like', and the pupil was not put off by realising that he had misidentified a word, but was willing to try again.

The trainee might have used the stimulus material a little more extensively to stimulate pupil response to the text, but he was able to achieve the objectives of the lesson.

4.7.2 Comprehension strategies: Making predictions

This trainee had an excellent command of the strategy he wanted to teach, and was very effective in initiating pupils into the use of the strategy in reading comprehension. His set induction dramatised ways in which they used predictions to try to interpret situations in their daily lives, and when his proposed situation had to be abandoned because of an unexpected event, he moved easily to encourage them to make inferences about who the researcher was, and to predict what the researcher's role would be during the lesson.

He was very dramatic in his reading of the story he set out on a chart. The chart was well laid out and visible to all the pupils, and the subject of the story - a woman who stole, and learned a lesson by the consequences of her actions - appealed to them. There was a high level of class involvement in the events of the story, with pupils eager to volunteer interpretations, to make predictions, and to evaluate the accuracy of those predictions as the story moved on. Also, he directed his questions to pupils in every part of the class, and was extremely supportive in his responses to pupils' predictions.

An exercise at the end allowed them to extend their responses to the story, and so to read as writers themselves. The main weakness of this lesson was that the trainee had totally miscalculated the time it would take for pupils to respond to a story of that length, as they made predictions, tested those predictions, and suggested alternatives. The story took twice as much time as he had expected.

4.7.3 Sequencing a story

In this lesson, the trainee intended to teach pupils about story sequence. The lesson demonstrated several misconceptions held by the trainee. To begin with, she described the lesson as being about grammar, instead of story grammar, which was apparently what she was trying to teach. Some of her proposed objectives were unrelated to the main topic of the lesson, and so were never provided for, or obtained. One, for example, was that pupils reading the story should develop "proper values." No discussion about issues of values emerged at any point in the lesson.

The stimulus material she used was a story about the antics of a raccoon. The pupils knew nothing about raccoons, when she asked them during the set induction to tell what they knew about the behaviour of these animals. The pictures of raccoons passed around were small, were passed around slowly, and were more of a distraction, since pupils focused on the picture rather than on the details of the story they were later asked to sequence. Her initial reading of the story was rather uninspired, and she lost the attention of a number of pupils early in the lesson. She never seemed to notice that some of the pupils were not attending, focusing most on the pupils at the front who were involved in the story.

When she placed the story in the form of jumbled sentences on the board, some pupils tried to develop it, using principles which demonstrated that they had already internalised the rules governing story grammar, and had grasped the meaning of the text. The trainee,

however, corrected these pupils, favouring, instead, pupils who reproduced the story according to a literal sequence. Given the way she herself had summarised the events on the sentence strips she prepared for them to work with, this led to their proposing an illogical sequence of events.

The questions the trainee used to elicit responses to the text were closed, and gave rise to one-word responses: “Did you like that story?” “Yes, Miss.” “Do you think that was a good thing for him to do?” “No, Miss.” Other questions were never related to the task in hand.

She established closure by inviting them to read the restructured story – by now illogically sequenced, and to colour a picture. Again, the final activity left no real understanding of whether the objectives of the lesson had been met. Later, though, she indicated that to her mind, the principal objective had been met, since they restructured the story in a way she thought was effective. As indicated, that point is debatable.

4.8 Performance in Science Classes

Only 3 of the 41 lessons observed were science classes. Science is only taught for one or two periods in a given week. Further, supervisors reported that trainees tend to shy away from teaching science because they find the task daunting. The three science lessons taught, which were all at the Standard 1 level, are described next.

4.8.1 Parts of a leaf

Pupils were expected to observe and identify the parts of a leaf. The trainee used a whole-group, teacher-centred approach to teaching. The trainee was obviously unprepared for his lesson. His pupils remained unattended for 15 minutes while he made his preparations (the cooperating teacher was absent).

The trainee’s strategy for concept development was to draw a leaf on the blackboard and write down the names of parts of the leaf on the blackboard. Pupils were then expected to “guess” which part of the leaf was associated with the name. In spite of having a leaf in front of them, pupils were denied the opportunity to touch the leaf, turn it over, and perhaps identify *other* parts to be named.

There was evidence of conceptual weaknesses on the part of this trainee. He informed his pupils that all the “space” inside the leaf is the leaf blade.

Only during the evaluation were pupils asked to trace the leaf in their books and label the parts. In fact, the actual leaf served little purpose in aiding concept development. The pupils could very well have used the drawing on the board.

The trainee expected his pupils to sit with arms folded throughout a lesson where there was supposed to be some engagement with a leaf. He reminded them five times during

the lesson to keep their arms folded. On one occasion when the pupils were *on task* and talking quietly to each other, he stopped the lesson to conduct a drill exercise. He also had an unusual strategy (probably because he was unfamiliar with names) of calling one name, but looking at another pupil. This created much confusion, as neither the pupil who was being called nor the pupil at whom he was looking knew to whom the question was really directed.

4.8.2 *Healthy plants*

In this lesson, pupils were required to carry out an activity to verify what plants need for healthy growth.

This lesson never really developed as intended. Few of the pupils responded to the trainee's request to bring in plants. Faced with this dilemma *before* she was scheduled to teach, she was unable to respond in a creative way. There was no contingency plan in place. She still attempted to teach the lesson as planned.

The trainee used a good set induction to introduce her lesson (a healthy plant and a wilted plant), and questioned pupils on what might have caused the plant to wilt, and what was needed to keep a plant looking healthy. After getting some answers such as "air, water, sunlight and soil," the trainee was unsure how to continue the lesson as she did not have enough plants for the investigation. She then tried to explain to very passive and bored pupils how they were to use the record sheet when they did eventually bring their plants. Other than the three or four questions asked at the beginning, pupils were not given opportunities for interaction either with the teacher or with each other, and no science was really taught.

4.8.3 *Parts of an insect*

Pupils were expected to observe a number of insects, identify the number of specified parts, and make some kind of generalisation.

The trainee used a small-group strategy that required the pupils to make some inferences through inductive reasoning. The trainee's lesson was well conceptualised and her pupils were actively engaged in the learning process. She displayed an understanding of how to teach for concept development. For example, although her activity as planned should have led to concept development, when faced with what seemed like an anomalous situation, she allowed her pupils to repeat the process, giving them the opportunity to clarify the misconception.

Of the three trainees, this was the only one who was able to choose a strategy that was appropriate for process skill and concept development. The small-group strategy and selection of resources (a variety of insects) gave pupils the opportunity to carefully observe, to explore, and to be engaged in critical thinking, a high order skill that is often neglected. Good questioning techniques also helped in getting pupils to arrive at some generalisations about insects. Clear instructions for the group activity would have

improved the lesson. This lesson was the only one of the three where there was full participation of all pupils in the lesson.

4.9 Performance in Mathematics Classes

Nine mathematics lessons were observed. The breakdown of these lessons is shown in Table 4.2. The three lessons marked with asterisks are presented in more detail.

Table 4.2: Summary of the 9 Mathematics Lessons Observed

Class	Nature of lesson taught
2 nd year Infants	Money: Equivalence (1cent to 10 cents)
2 nd year Infants	Money: Equivalence (\$1 to \$10)
Standard 1	Measuring lengths using estimates and verification
Standard 1	Subtracting a 2-digit number from a 2-digit number without “borrowing”
Standard 1	Measuring the area of a rectangle
Standard 2*	Measuring time – using a clock
Standard 3*	Graphical representations - pictographs
Standard 4	Statistics
Standard 4*	Graphical representations – bar graphs and pie charts

4.9.1 Pictographs

This lesson was taught to a Standard 3 class.

The class began with the trainee focusing the attention of the pupils on two diagrams drawn on the blackboard. The diagrams were pictographs representing the same quantities, but one was arranged vertically and the other was arranged horizontally. The trainee began by asking the pupils to decide whether the two were similar or different. The questions asked were leading questions and the pupils responded with one-word answers or simple phrases. The trainee insisted that pupils answer in complete sentences and got the pupils to rephrase their response when they failed to give a complete sentence. Eventually, with much prompting, the pupils said that the two diagrams were the same.

The trainee then put up a chart with a pictograph showing the various numbers of butterflies caught by different people. The trainee then tried to get pupils to interpret the pictograph by asking questions such as: “Who caught the most butterflies?” The questions were simple and pupils responded readily.

The trainee started the evaluation of the lesson by asking simple recall questions. Then, she distributed a worksheet to all but five pupils and then announced that she had a “special” worksheet for that group (it turned out that these pupils were slower readers than the others).

The entire lesson was teacher directed. The trainee later explained that she thought it was important to have pupils see pictographs vertically and horizontally since "... if I just make a change it throws them off balance. For instance, if you are writing something and for some reason you may write it a different way, they can't do it because of the change."

By the end of the class, pupils had hardly learnt any new mathematics. It was also uncertain that they had understood why they were asked to compare the vertical and horizontal pictographs.

4.9.2 Telling the time

The trainee had prepared a large clock with movable hands for this Standard 2 class, and the clock was mounted on the blackboard. She began the class by reviewing the process of telling the hour using the long hand and the short hand of the clock. Individual pupils responded to the trainee's questions and some were called to the blackboard to fix the hands on the clock. Pupils were eager to respond and to get a chance to set the clock.

The trainee then moved on to showing the pupils how to tell the time using the half hour and the quarter hour, again using the big clock on the blackboard. She then asked the pupils to manipulate their own miniature clocks (which she distributed at that point) while following her instructions. The trainee moved around the room while pupils tried out telling the time as instructed. She interacted with pupils providing guidance as necessary.

For the evaluation, the trainee wrote the time on the blackboard, then asked the pupils to show the time on their clocks. They were then to display the time so that the trainee could see if they had mastered the skill. Pupils appeared to be handling the task well but the lesson ended before they had all completed the task.

This trainee's step-by step presentation using manipulatives was very clear and the pupils were keenly interested. She distributed her questions well across the class, although some of the questions could have been better formulated.

4.9.3 Graphical representations

The trainee had designed this lesson with the objectives that pupils would be able to interpret a pie chart and they would also be able to "explain the relationship between a bar graph and a pie chart."

The set induction was a story about a boy, Tom, who had to share his pizza with his friends. Through questioning, the trainee directed pupils' attention to a drawing of a pie chart on the blackboard and reviewed the properties of a pie chart. She asked them to assume that Tom ate most of the pizza and to identify some possible representations of this on the pie chart. The pupils listened attentively and participated readily, providing appropriate answers.

Next, a bar graph representing the quantities of different flavours of ice cream was presented to the class. Again, through questions such as: “Which flavour is most represented? Which least?” the trainee sought to get pupils to interpret the representation.

In the last segment of the lesson, the trainee asked pupils to describe the relationship between a pie chart and a bar graph. Pupils experienced considerable difficulty in dealing with this question and the issue was never fully clarified.

For the evaluation of the lesson, the trainee provided pupils with slips of paper on which were written very simple questions about the graphical representations. They contained nothing about the relationship between bar graphs and pie charts.

4.10 The Role of the Cooperating Teacher

As happened in the first teaching practice session, trainees’ reports of their relationship with their cooperating teachers varied. Some said that cooperating teachers absented themselves throughout the entire four-week period, or through a significant part. There was the perception that some of these cooperating teachers saw the teaching practice period as a time when they could take a rest from their teaching duties. Some cooperating teachers who did not stay with the trainees were unavoidably absent – they might have been asked to substitute for other teachers who were absent, or, in the case of senior teachers, for the principal, if that person was called away to meetings or workshops. Others trainees reported that cooperating teachers did stay to ensure that order was maintained in their classrooms and that lessons went smoothly. In cases where cooperating teachers stayed, most adopted a nurturing role to the trainees assigned to them, as well as to the pupils in their care.

All of the 19 cooperating teachers interviewed said that they saw their role as a nurturing one. They emphasised that they tried to make trainees comfortable, to ensure that they had the materials that they needed, to maintain discipline in the class, and to help with correcting work assigned by the trainees. Some even reported that they often worked with trainees in the pre-lesson phase to predict what pupils might say or do in response to certain stages in the instruction. However, what cooperating teachers said they felt and what they actually did feel may not have been the same thing, since at least some cooperating teachers who said they felt comfortable having the trainees in their classes, and that they wanted to help them, were reported by the trainees to have been openly hostile or indifferent.

Not all cooperating teachers were happy with their roles. Two reported that there was no clear indication of what their role was and that trainees were even reluctant to show them their lesson plans when they were asked to do so. Two other cooperating teachers who were faced with unpunctuality and absenteeism on the part of trainees expressed their reluctance to continue serving in this capacity in the future.

Some cooperating teachers who stayed on indicated that their presence during the lessons taught by trainees was largely because they felt trainees' performance was still uneven. As one cooperating teacher remarked when the supervisor was not there to see a lesson, "...the children at risk. Teaching will be done, but not to the best." In such cases, as one cooperating teacher said, whatever happened with the trainee, "...my job is to teach my class." In other words, cooperating teachers felt they had to pick up the slack, to ensure that their pupils did not suffer.

On the other hand, five trainees commented that their cooperating teachers stayed around, but were of little or no help to them. In some cases, this may have been because cooperating teachers felt out of their depth with the new strategies expected of the trainees, and were insecure about their ability to help them. One trainee contended that with the cooperating teachers, "...we are continually faced with, 'I don't know alyuh new thing. I don't know alyuh new method. I don't know what alyuh doing.'" Another trainee was actively discouraged by an older cooperating teacher from using some of the less traditional strategies. This cooperating teacher had advised: "Don't make this wuk hard, because of the number of resources and what not." Two trainees suggested that cooperating teachers needed to be included in all post-teaching conferences, so that they could share some common understandings with the supervisors, and could understand the rationale behind some of the approaches taken by trainees.

The absence of some cooperating teachers meant that when trainees had expected to have to teach four lessons a day, the workload for the entire day fell on their shoulders. These trainees had already been fully occupied trying to prepare the 80 lessons demanded of them over the four-week session. This had two results. One was that the four-week session was physically gruelling, in that they taught all day, and then had to prepare lessons and resource materials way into the night. The other was that, in spite of all this effort, they were not learning as much or doing as well as if they had had the guidance and assistance of their cooperating teachers.

Three trainees from Valsayn Teachers' College reported open conflict with their cooperating teachers. Trainees gave different reasons for these conflicts. Some apparently arose from differing philosophies about teaching. One trainee, for instance, said that his cooperating teacher believed in corporal punishment, while he (the trainee) used "a motivational type of discipline." Other conflicts were identified by trainees as arising out of issues of territoriality, as when one trainee complained that her cooperating teacher refused to take down any of the charts she had made to allow the trainee to put her charts up on the board. In one particular case, the conflict was indeed severe. This trainee had been assigned by the principal of the school to a cooperating teacher who had indicated quite clearly that she did not wish to act as one. In the words of the trainee "...it was a kind of battle between the principal and her for a while there, and then, you know, I was just there in the middle, wondering, well, what to do." The principal would actually sit in on some classes to ensure that the trainee was allowed to teach, and when the principal was not there, the trainee explained, "I actually had to fight, you know, with her, then, to teach my lessons." According to the trainee, towards the end of the session, this cooperating teacher informed her class, in the trainee teacher's hearing, that from the

following week she alone would have them, and she would punish them for any wrong behaviour they had “picked up” from the trainee.

Finally, during this teaching practice round, it was observed that four cooperating teachers assigned to trainees were themselves untrained, and so were unable to be of much practical use in providing guidance in matters of instruction. Indeed, some of these cooperating teachers when interviewed, indicated that they had been so impressed by the new strategies they had observed that they were totally unfamiliar with, that they were now looking forward to the Teachers’ College experience themselves. In these cases, cooperating teachers were only too glad to sit in on classes taught by the trainees, who indicated that they nevertheless appreciated the help of their cooperating teachers in telling them about the children they were expected to teach, and in helping them to maintain order in the classroom or to distribute materials for different activities. In cases such as these, when trainees felt that they needed the guidance of a trained teacher, some chose to consult with other, more experienced teachers on staff; however, in two cases where the cooperating teacher refused to be involved at all, this became a real problem to the trainees, who said they received little guidance about important issues, such as the needs and abilities of the pupils in the classes to which they were assigned.

4.11 Post-Lesson Conferencing Sessions

It was noticeable that, at this stage of the teaching practice, most trainees appeared much more confident in asserting their reasons for using certain approaches, even in the face of the supervisors’ suggestions that other approaches might have been more effective. One trainee teacher who had often gone significantly over time, for instance, continued to assert, even at the end of the teaching practice, that he felt it was more important to go on with a lesson, once the children were caught up in the learning process, than to observe the limitations imposed by classroom schedules. In another case, when a supervisor suggested that a trainee might have upbraided pupils for laughing at one of their peers, the trainee replied, “I didn’t see anything wrong with that part. That was to teach him a lesson, so that next time he would pay more attention.”

However, trainees’ apparent new assertiveness might occasionally have constituted a form of defensiveness of themselves or their colleagues in situations where they interpreted the supervisors’ comments as criticisms of themselves. For instance, the trainee who disagreed with his supervisor during the post-conferencing session on the issue of time management later indicated, in an interview, that he knew he had always had problems with this issue, even before coming to the Training College, and that he felt, “on reflection,” that this practice of his was short-circuiting his pupils’ learning process.

At these later sessions, trainees were now more often prepared to do self evaluation, instead of deferring to their supervisors’ appraisal of lessons taught. As yet, however, self evaluations continued to be brief and often quite global in character. Trainees might say,

for instance, “I think I was a little smoother. I had a closure and an evaluation. I believe I had all the parts. Some areas I did not spend too much time on.”

Most often, supervisors still dominated the sessions, in that they conducted the detailed analyses of lessons observed. In some cases, too, supervisors’ personal styles were such that they seemed mainly to be requiring trainees to respond to their comments, rather than to be eliciting trainees’ own impressions and intentions in conducting their classes. However, styles differed, and other supervisors did conduct the post-conferencing sessions more collaboratively, seeking to elicit trainees’ and cooperating teachers’ impressions about the various events of instruction, and about the dynamics of the lesson, as well as making their own inputs.

Supervisors’ styles also differed in terms of how they structured their responses to the lessons. In some cases, supervisors were clearly guided mainly by the assessment form provided by the Colleges for evaluating lessons. Supervisors might emphasise the technical proficiency of trainees, as evidenced by their ability to satisfy the different criteria as defined by the form. However, those supervisors who conducted the post-conferencing sessions more collaboratively also tended to be more holistic in their comments on a lesson. These supervisors used the form as a reference point, while placing primary focus on the lesson in its context, rather than viewing the lesson more as something to be commented on at intervals, in the context of its approximation to the criteria indicated by the form.

In most cases, supervisors tried, during these sessions, to encourage trainees, and to accentuate the positive aspects of their performance. One supervisor did note, however, that she tended to be somewhat more stringent in her analyses of trainees’ performance during this round, since she was aware that the next round would constitute their final teaching practice. Some supervisors also used issues which were raised at one post-conferencing session to inform later sessions with trainees, in which they guided them through strategies they could use to address the issues before they were next observed.

During the post-conferencing sessions, cooperating teachers again demonstrated varying degrees of involvement. Some stayed away from both the teaching and the post-conferencing sessions altogether. Most who stayed on were encouraged by supervisors to make comments. Generally, cooperating teachers tended to couch criticisms of trainees in guarded terms. “I felt he included a lot in the lesson” was all one cooperating teacher said of a lesson for Year II Infants which contained enough content for two separate lessons. However, she later told the researcher that she was amazed at how much the trainee had tried to do all at once. In general, cooperating teachers’ comments accentuated the positive aspects of lessons taught by trainees, or else they simply acquiesced to criticisms made by the supervisors, rather than making criticisms based solely on their own observations, experience, and knowledge of their classes.

Not all supervisors were equally willing to have cooperating teachers sit in on the post – conferencing sessions. One supervisor indicated that she did not want cooperating teachers participating in the sessions, because she felt that their empathy with the

trainees, with regard to what they recognised as the pressures of the teaching practice, often made them less objective in their assessment of trainees' performance, coming down on the side of leniency.

Supervisors had differing perceptions on the issue of whether growth in trainees' competence had occurred between the first and second rounds. Some felt that many of the same problems they had identified in the trainees during the first round were still obvious in the trainees they were supervising for the second round. Others felt that they had seen definite improvements in the overall standard of performance of trainees assigned to them this time. In the case where the researcher observed the same group of trainees during both rounds, definite improvements in their performance were reported.

4.12 Trainees' Perceptions of the Teaching Practice

Most trainees agreed that they felt better prepared for the second teaching practice, in terms of their unit and lesson planning. They felt that this time around, they knew what to expect, and they could reflect on lessons learned on the first teaching practice round, and try to avoid previous mistakes. A number of trainees commented, however, on the fact that they still felt inadequately prepared to meet the requirements for teaching at all different **levels** of the primary school. Some trainees felt that not enough classes were devoted to methods appropriate to teaching at specific levels. In such a situation, they fell back on their experiences at the primary schools where they were taught before coming to the Teachers' College, or conferred with their cooperating teachers, with senior students at the Teachers' College, or with friends who had recently completed the programme.

One comment made by different trainees was that they felt that too much time was spent on coverage of unnecessary content at the Colleges, to the neglect of areas that trainees felt would be more helpful to them in the classroom. One noted, for example, that he felt a lot of time was spent on facts like where Piaget lived, and his family life, that would have been better employed in doing things like having lecturers demonstrate strategies, or on aspects of theory that were more directly relevant to their classroom practice.

Trainees resorted to different strategies to deal with the teaching practice. Some trainees described how their entire group prepared units in common, and then adapted ideas to meet the needs of specific groups of pupils. They also shared notes on comments made by their supervisors during the first teaching practice round. Some went to senior students for advice, and for units. Supervisors indicated that they were aware that some trainees were buying units and using them, with greater or lesser degrees of understanding. Though trainees generally didn't admit that this was so, a few did indeed admit that there was "fraudulence." Other trainees referred to resorting to "plans" and "notes" lodged in the College library at Corinth.

Even though they may have felt better prepared generally for the unit and lesson planning aspects of the programme, however, all the trainees agreed that the experience was extremely stressful; some trainees, in fact, said that they found it even more stressful than

the first teaching practice session. Sources of stress identified by trainees included the fact that it was physically tiring, especially for those trainees on whom the entire workload of the class to which they were assigned fell, in situations where the class teacher was absent. Trainees said they also found the session emotionally stressful, because they were always aware that they were being graded. One trainee said that whenever she saw her supervisor appear, she would think, “Oh God! Well he’s here!”

Trainees worried about their pupils’ behaviour as well as their own performance. For one thing, they generally tried to establish an agreement with their pupils that they should be on their best behaviour when the supervisor visited. Cooperating teachers often helped to reinforce this. In addition, trainees felt keenly aware that however well they may have taught generally, their performance on the lessons supervisors saw would largely determine how they were assessed. Trainees were also concerned about the unevenness of the experience for different individuals. They pointed out that some supervisors saw trainees several times, while others saw them only once or twice. They felt that this difference had implications for how much guidance they received, and how fairly they were assessed.

Some trainees also coped by adapting the lessons their supervisors would observe, so they would be in tune with what trainees perceived supervisors wanted, even if they felt that their creativity was impaired when they did this. One trainee noted that he would never try unusual things when his supervisor was present. He would wait until the supervisor wasn’t there, and try them then, to see how well they worked. At such times he would ask his cooperating teacher, who was very helpful, to give her comments. In cases where trainees’ cooperating teachers were absent, trainees would use their own judgment in deciding how effective the new strategy was.

A significant aspect of trainees’ development of strategies to negotiate the challenges of the teaching practice entailed finding ways to “read” what their supervisors wanted. They shared their experiences with supervisors with each other, they shared documents that provided indications of how supervisors assessed aspects of their performance, and they devoted conscious effort during the teaching practice to interpreting what each supervisor expected. As one trainee commented, “ It’s a straightforward case of, I am here to get a Diploma. So I will decide what Mr. X (the supervisor) is looking for, and I will give him that.”

Trainees expressed concern about the fairness of the assessment by supervisors. Some complained that unit plans that had been given a Grade A by one supervisor might be assessed and given a Grade C by another. They indicated that there was some discussion among trainees about how this demonstrated the subjectivity involved in assessment practices, and that they wondered to what extent this subjectivity persisted in other areas of performance on which they were being assessed.

It is possible – though no trainee admitted to deliberate absenteeism – that instances of absenteeism and unpunctuality discerned by supervisors, cooperating teachers, and researchers alike also constituted another attempt to cope with the stress of the situation,

in a context where trainees now knew, from their previous experience with teaching practice, how much leeway they had when they were out in the schools.

4.13 Summary

The following significant features of this second teaching practice round were observed:

Changes in trainees' performance over the two rounds

There was no consistent trend in terms of growth observed between the first and second teaching practice rounds. Seven supervisors did indicate that they saw improvements in the general standard of performance of trainees supervised in the second practice, but one supervisor said she saw no significant shifts in different aspects of trainees' performance and that, in her experience, the real shift came during the last teaching practice. Another supervisor said that there were some trainees who appeared to have regressed, and who actually performed worse during the second round. In the cases where this happened, however, the supervisor attributed their apparent regression to the fact that trainees did not feel comfortable teaching the age groups to which they were assigned for the second teaching practice. This suggestion was borne out by the comments of some of the trainees themselves. In the one case where a researcher saw the same group at both teaching practices, he indicated that the trainees he saw seemed to have improved in their grasp of the concepts central to their subject areas, and in their techniques. He noted, too, that their lesson plans seemed better conceptualised, and that they seemed more confident.

Trainees' preparation: Content knowledge

There continued to be some deficiencies in trainees' knowledge of subject content, especially in areas that may not have been emphasised on the curricula of the primary schools from which trainees came to the Training College. Areas which are traditionally emphasised on the primary school curriculum are often also those areas where many trainees demonstrated a surer grasp of content knowledge. Some trainees, and one supervisor interviewed, suggested that trainees' level of experience with teaching the content of certain subjects on the primary school syllabus before coming to the Teachers' College was a significant factor in determining their grasp of the content at this stage. However, this is not invariably true, as college lecturers in subject areas like mathematics and English, which *are* emphasized on the primary school curriculum, described significant deficiencies in trainees' grasp of important concepts in these subjects.

Trainees' preparation: General pedagogical skills

Trainees observed on this round generally demonstrated a significantly greater knowledge of a range of strategies for facilitating learning, including a wider range of student-centred approaches, than was the case with trainees observed during the first teaching practice round. They also showed a greater willingness to use these strategies. At this stage, however, their ability to utilise the strategies *effectively* was still somewhat uncertain. Trainees also still seem challenged in terms of their ability to respond spontaneously to the dynamics of classroom situations, although many who were interviewed seemed more aware of the sorts of contingencies that may arise, and made

some attempt to consult with the cooperating teachers beforehand, where possible, and to plan for such contingencies.

Trainees often said that they did not feel adequately prepared to employ methods and strategies which might be appropriate for meeting the specific developmental needs of pupils at different levels of the primary school. As before, trainees established an excellent rapport with their pupils, and made every effort to bolster their confidence, and to establish a classroom environment where they felt emotionally secure.

Trainees' preparation: Pedagogical content knowledge

While there was some improvement on the part of the trainees, at least two demonstrated that they were still uncertain about how to deal with concepts, and to make them accessible to pupils in some subject areas.

Professionalism of trainees

A decline was observed in the work ethic of some trainee teachers at Valsayn Teachers' College, as compared to those observed during the first teaching practice round. This manifested itself in different ways, including a greater level of unpunctuality, absenteeism, and failure to prepare lessons adequately. Trainees and cooperating teachers also admitted that, for these trainees, there was a clear difference in the type of effort they were willing to expend when observed by their supervisors as compared to what they did when supervisors were absent.

Quality of practice sites

The wide range in quality of the facilities offered at different practice sites continued to play a significant role in determining the types of opportunities offered to trainees to apply the strategies and techniques they were being taught at the Teachers' Colleges. "Range in quality" subsumes such features as: physical characteristics of the host schools, professional expertise and cooperativeness of cooperating teachers, and school cultures which are more or less receptive to innovative teaching approaches. In schools and classrooms observed, however, with only a few exceptions, attempts were made to make the trainees feel welcome, and to help them to fit into the culture of the schools.

Trainees' perceptions of the teaching practice

All trainees agreed that the teaching practice was an important and valued part of the Teachers' College experience. However, most trainees continued to speak of it as highly stressful, and as being of varying helpfulness. This was due mainly to the following features of the experience:

1. Trainees' consciousness that they were being evaluated by their supervisors, which, they said, sometimes constrained them in the risks they were willing to take in trying new things when observed by supervisors.
2. Trainees' perceptions that different supervisors provided different levels of guidance and supervision, even in terms of the number of visits paid to different trainees.

3. The gruelling workloads imposed in cases where cooperating teachers were absent, and trainees took full responsibility for their classes, without getting adequate feedback on their practice.
4. The differing levels of cooperation and professional expertise of cooperating teachers, so that there were significant differences in the type of guidance and feedback trainees got in sessions which were not observed by their supervisors. Such sessions necessarily constituted the greater proportion of the teaching practice.

Communications between host schools and colleges

Host schools, and some supervisors, continued to express the hope that the communication lines between the College and the host schools might be improved. Interviews elicited the fact that, although some supervisors tried to make principals and staff aware of what was hoped for from the host schools during the teaching practice sessions, and what was expected of the trainees, this was not always the case. As a result, different principals and cooperating teachers had different understandings of what practices and outcomes might be expected, and regulated their own conduct to the trainees accordingly.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary of findings

There were differences in provisions for practice in teaching, as well as in the structure of the PET programme between the Colleges. Valsayn seemed to have a more structured PET programme than Corinth. At Corinth, experimentation is continuing in an attempt to find an appropriate structure for the PET programme. Corinth employs a system which involves trainees in group preparation for, and conduct of, teaching before they are sent out on their own on their first real teaching practice assignment. Valsayn does not have a similar system.

The provisions for practice also varied significantly among the cooperating schools, and determined the type of opportunities offered to trainees for applying the strategies taught. The critical provisions which facilitated the trainees' work included good physical characteristics of the receiving schools (discrete classrooms, low noise level, etc.), the professional expertise and cooperativeness of cooperating teachers, as well as a school culture which was receptive to innovative teaching approaches.

Teacher educators generally viewed the provisions for teaching practice as less than ideal. They outlined that they carried a heavy workload during teaching practice rounds, since they would be required to be supervising one year group in the field while having to conduct in-college sessions with the other year group during the same period. The task of checking the units trainees prepared for teaching practice was also described as contributing to this heavy workload. One of the areas of great concern for teacher educators was the absence of shared understandings among the College administration and the principal and staff of the cooperating schools about roles and responsibilities during the teaching practice. This resulted in varying levels of support for trainees in the host schools.

Trainees were generally of the view that they were overburdened with work in preparing units and lessons for teaching practice sessions. Some of them felt that they needed far more instruction in the area of unit and lesson planning before being sent into the field. Whilst trainees acknowledged that physical conditions in the receiving schools were not always ideal, they were more concerned about the different levels of support provided by supervisors as well as cooperating teachers. The levels of support from supervisors spanned the full range from sharing and nurturing relationships to autocratic ones. In the case of the cooperating teachers, there were those who were genuinely concerned about the well-being of trainees and did what they could (with the limited preparation that they had for the task) to facilitate the trainees' work. At the other extreme, there were those cooperating teachers who saw the teaching practice attachment as the time to take a rest from their work and who absented themselves from the classroom. The absence of

proper support from supervisors and/or cooperating teachers reduced the willingness of trainees to try out new strategies in the classroom, especially in the presence of supervisors who were also there to grade them.

Most trainees were conscientious about making use of what they had learnt at College during the teaching practice. Some maximised this by working in groups in preparing for teaching practice. This often resulted in enhanced planning and delivery of lessons and in the production of quality resource materials. Unfortunately, some trainees were unable to maximise their preparation time either because of poor time management, poor attitude to the teaching practice, or, in the case of an unfortunate few, additional responsibilities due to the absence of the cooperating teacher.

Trainees agreed that their first teaching practice was a learning experience, that they were better prepared for the second teaching practice, and that they were looking forward to the final session. Some felt that not enough time was spent on the teaching of methodologies, and educational theory and practice at the College. There were also concerns about the fairness of the assessment of the teaching practice since contact time between trainees and their supervisors varied. There was the perception that there was some correlation between the number of visits received and the quality of feedback and guidance given. Furthermore, trainees reported that the grading practices of supervising lecturers were not uniform and they were able to cite concrete examples of instances where this lack of uniformity had been displayed.

5.2 Discussion

This study has revealed that teaching practice, as it is currently conceived and executed, is problematic. It is problematic from several angles. There is the question of the kind of primary schoolteacher that is necessary for the schools in Trinidad and Tobago today. There is the question of the kind of curriculum that will best prepare these teachers. There is also the question of the nature of the teaching practice experience that will best prepare trainees to function in today's schools.

Problems surfaced particularly with respect to the difficulty that trainees experience in negotiating the theory/practice interface. Perhaps trainees need to be given more opportunities to become aware of their beliefs about teaching and its contexts, and to question these beliefs in the light of their new experiences. There is little reference in the Teachers' College curriculum document (except in the case of Language Arts) to developing capacities in trainees for reflective action. In the absence of any stated philosophical orientation, there is also no reference point for reflection, although the concept of *reflection on action* (Schon, 1983) is embedded in the teaching practice as part of the post-lesson conferences. A greater emphasis on reflective action, both *reflection on action* and *reflection in action* (Schon, 1983) may help to reduce some of the problems being currently experienced with the theory/practice interface. It may also help to reduce the intensity of complaints from several quarters that the trainees tend to be deficient in the area of methodology.

The arrangements for school attachments for teaching practice also need to be looked at more carefully. It is difficult to understand why closer links do not exist between supervising lecturers, cooperating teachers, and principals of cooperating schools. Neither the College officials nor Ministry of Education staff have been able to organise, on a sustained basis, for the proper articulation of the roles and functions of these various stakeholders, and their interaction in meaningful ways. One would also need to examine the structure of the attachment period in the schools. The current arrangement of three block periods does not seem to be the most efficient one, although trainees did report that they had received some benefits from the exposure. If the trainees' presence in a real classroom is seen as essential for the development of good practice, and given that the nature of the primary school classroom in Trinidad and Tobago today is changing rapidly, then a longer school attachment, with properly trained cooperating teachers, would seem to be a more viable option.

Is primary teacher education at the Teachers' Colleges in Trinidad and Tobago making a difference in the teaching abilities of trainees who undertake the two-year programme? The evidence suggests that trainees do make some gains as they move through the programme. The further question that must be asked, though, is: "At what costs are these gains made?" As presently constituted, there seems to be a heavy cost with respect to trainees' physical, mental, and emotional energy, and there is little evidence that these high costs are counterbalanced by superior outcomes. The question of financial cost has not been considered in this sub-study (see sub-study on "Costs" for this analysis) but indications are that the efficiency of the system can also be queried on this basis. Perhaps, the time is right for the re-engineering of the Teachers' College curriculum to cater more efficiently for the desired outcomes.

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- In order to standardise teaching practice requirements, roles and responsibilities of the partners must be articulated and clearly communicated. The fragile institutional relationships between the Colleges and the receiving schools need to be strengthened. There must be some formalised inter-institutional agreement to guide the nature of the participation. Since the college administrators, the supervising lecturers, and the cooperating schools are all partners in the practice component of teacher training, there must be shared understandings of individual roles and responsibilities. The school attachment in the preparation of teachers is assumed to be a no-cost factor. True partnership, however, is a high-stakes investment where each partner puts into the equation improvement strategies that are meaningful, with each partner sharing the responsibility for making the improvements a reality. There must be the creation of new roles and role relationships that fully acknowledge the roles of the receiving schools and the cooperating teachers. These changes require commitment, time and resources, and new patterns of governance that rest on shared assumptions about teaching.
- Criteria for the selection of cooperating teachers must be indicated. There must be formal recognition and preparation of cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers

should have professional certification and should be selected based on recommendations from principals and school supervisors. They should be given additional training through workshops/short courses on mentoring and clinical supervision, after which they may be referred to as “expert” or “distinguished” teachers. These “distinguished” teachers will then form a pool from which cooperating teachers may be selected as required.

- There should be incentives for cooperating teachers. In order to encourage teachers to continue their professional development, “distinguished” teachers should be formally recognised (e.g., by upgrading or certification), and those who serve as cooperating teachers should be given a small stipend. In addition, such school-based responsibility should be considered a criterion for promotion.
- The structure of the school attachment must be revisited. Trainee teachers need to spend longer periods in the receiving schools and, so, other options for restructuring the teaching practice should be explored. One option is to have curriculum modules organised in blocks, so that one term is devoted to teaching practice. This would allow all trainees and supervisors to be out in the field at the same time, enhancing the quality of supervision as well as feedback. It is proposed that all the stakeholders come together to work out the best arrangement for the school attachment.
- Assessment practices must be revisited. The system of grading trainees from the initial teaching practice sessions should be discontinued. The initial period should provide trainees with the necessary support to improve their practice, allowing opportunities for self-assessment through personal reflections, as well as feedback from supervisors and cooperating teachers. There should be clear criteria for assessment, and grading practices should be consistent.

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