The State of Teacher Educators in Latin America and the Caribbean

Jill A. Perry
Spring 2006

Introduction

In the late 1980s and 1990s most Latin American and Caribbean countries implemented education reforms. At the center of these reforms were teachers. They were both the subjects and the objects of change (Villegas-Reimers 2003). They were often viewed as the leaders, agents and implementers of reform charged with the goal of improving a nation weighing on their shoulders. Who teachers are and what they thought of reforms was of little importance. Teacher training and trainers held even less importance. Giroux (1988) indicates that teachers were frequently left out of the education debate except when defining their role as technicians. "They are the object of educational reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life" (p. 121). That is, teachers were understood to be functions of reform, not catalysts or analysts for creating reform.

Today, teachers still struggle under minimal consideration and high demands. They are viewed by the ministries of education, and even the general public, as factors of the education process or as obstacles to achieving education reform. They are trained in institutes or universities that give less consideration to their training than what is given to other careers. And yet, they are expected to guide and create future generations. What preparations do teachers have that allows them to respond to these challenges?

This paper seeks to provide an overview of the state of teacher education in Latin America and the Caribbean. It also seeks to understand the people behind teacher education— teacher educators. The paper will be divided into three parts. The first part will provide the landscape of teacher education in the region. This landscape will cover

the major themes and tensions that face teacher education. The second part will look at teacher educators and key components that affect their role. Finally, the last part will provide some suggestions regarding the future of teacher educators in Latin America.

Landscape of Teacher Education

Education reforms in Latin America and the Caribbean were primarily focused on preschool, elementary and secondary education systems. It wasn't until later when it was understood that there is a connection between school reform and the need for reform in teacher education. Villegas-Reimers (2003) outlines the goals that were required of teacher education reform. They were aimed at:

- the formation and professional development of teachers,
- the strategies to change the initial and in-service training
- the formation of teacher educators;
- the accreditation and evaluation of teacher educator institutes
- the standards of quality
- the occupation and democratization of evaluation

While these reform changes are necessary and beneficial, they are massive when considering the current landscape of teacher education through out Latin America and the Caribbean. There is no uniform course for becoming a teacher in this region. Each country has its own system of awarding teacher qualifications which is often varied and disconnected within the country. Teachers are trained in institutes of training, pedagogic institutes, normal institutes and universities without systematic guidelines for admission, standards or qualifications for new teachers among them. Applying reforms such as those listed above to teacher education requires greater understanding of the region, its individual nations, and the individual goals of education systems in each nation.

In this section, I will utilize the limited but detailed literature on teacher education in Latin America and the Caribbean. My sources for information come from studies undertaken by members of the education community in the region as well as from the work of the '2005 Hemispheric Project on Teacher-Education,' which has done a solid study of the specifics of teacher education in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Rather than repeat the literature that is present, I will focus on the broader themes of teacher education that have an effect on teacher educators. Though not all 34 Latin American and Caribbean nations are represented in these findings, the information available is enough to surmise a general understanding and provide a conceptual framework of teacher education in the region without resorting to generalizations.

Characterization of Teacher Training

Below is a general understanding of the characteristics of teacher training institutions in the region. Though much more could be said about the institutions that exist, here I provide the basic, essential elements to understand how teachers are prepared in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Types of institutions

Throughout the region, teachers are educated in various types of institutions, both public and private. There is no uniformity on the types of institutions that educated teachers and frequently, we see that prospective students have the choice within their home country to attend either teacher institutes or universities for their training. In Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay, for example, teacher education and training is found in post-secondary training institutes as well as in university-level programs. In Dominica,

students study at the Dominica Teachers' Training College, which is affiliated to the University of the West Indies. In Costa Rica and Cuba, teacher training is undertaken only at the university level.

Entrance Qualifications and Years of Study

Most countries require the completion of secondary studies and an entrance exam to be admitted into either the teacher institutes or the university programs. The number of study years varies more by institution type than by country. In most countries, teacher institutes generally require two to three years of post-secondary study. Where as at the university level, studies follow the same as other careers, which is four or five years of study. In some cases, the grade level in which a teacher will teach determines the amount of study necessary. For instance, in The Bahamas, certification for primary teachers entails a three-year course at the College of the Bahamas. To teach at the secondary level, students must complete a three-year Bachelor of Education at the University of the West Indies.

Administration of Teacher Education

In some countries, like Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, the responsibility for teacher education is shared between the Ministry of Education of the respective country and the institutes or universities that administer the training programs. In other countries, like Chile, autonomous universities administer responsibility and control over teacher education. Still others, such as Uruguay, have an independent agency, the *Instituto Nacional de la Educación Publica* (INEP) that works with the Ministry of Education to administer teacher education (Hemispheric Project 2005). In each case it is unclear what

amount of coordination exists to create a uniform system of curriculum for teacher training.

Themes

Several themes in teacher education resonate throughout the region. Below is a brief look at those themes that have a direct impact on the work of teacher educators.

Initial education

The initial training of teachers has gained much attention in recent years in Latin America and the Caribbean. Analysis and discussions have focused on everything from curriculum to teacher profiles. As the core (and sometimes only) training received by teachers, initial education has caught the eye of many analysts. Concerns have been placed on the "fragmentation of curriculum content, the domination of teaching based on memorization rather than practice and the scarce links between teacher training and the realities of education and the technical-pedagogical requirements of schools" (Barrios 2003, p. 39). Within the region, initial teacher training has been labeled as unresponsive to the changes and demands of the system. Initiatives to improve initial education have come about in many countries as a result. Key initiatives include more exposure to classrooms and training in pedagogic theory. In addition, there has been a movement to add a separate training phase, which is designed to complement initial training. This phase is often referred to as continuing, professional or in-service training.

In-service Education

In-service education varies throughout the region but is commonly recognized as training that occurs after a teacher has received her teaching credentials. In-service training takes many forms. It is commonly seen as training in a new technique or project that will be implemented later, like the phases of a reform. In many countries, this training is approached in a trickle-down manner where those at the highest levels of the education are trained in a subject and are expected to train those below them and so forth until all teachers are trained.

Another form of in-service education is coursework or training to specialize in an academic area. In a few countries, study toward a bachelor's degree is recognized as in-service training because it enhances the knowledge already gained by a teacher. Finally, some nations see postgraduate study as a form of in-service education.

Standards, Evaluation and Accreditation

The system of standards, evaluation and accreditation of the various methods of delivering teacher education is diverse across nations in the region. St. Kitts, Antigua and Barbuda and Mexico have national standards that guide initial education and professional development programs. Bolivia provides an example of a country that employs outside organizations (*SIMECAL* and *CONAMED*) to evaluate the entire education system. MERCOSUR members have aimed to created national accreditation centers to accompany agreed upon indicators for education quality (Hemispheric Project 2005). In other countries, laws mandate the need for evaluation and accreditation but there is no body or organization that holds the specific responsibilities.

Professionalization

The theme of professionalization reoccurs throughout the region and directly relates to the continued formation of teachers. Understanding what professionalization means in Latin America and the Caribbean plays a direct role on how professionalization is executed. Hargreaves (1996) explains the difference between professionalism and professionalization and the role that each play in teacher education. Professionalism refers to quality and standards improvement in teaching where as professionalization refers to the amount of respect a society holds for the quality and importance of teaching as a profession. The misunderstanding of the difference of these two terms has led to mass certificate granting in Latin America and the Caribbean as a means to promotion and professionalization of the career. However, quality training that would lead to the professionalism of the career infrequently backs these certificates.

Teacher educators

I was able to identify a few countries that have outlined the requirements needed to become a teacher educator. For instance, in Peru, teacher educators are required to have a professional degree, five years of teaching in the classroom, five years of study and a passing grade in the course of study. Columbia and Costa Rica require a bachelor's degree with a specialization. However, overall there is little discussion of teacher educators in the literature.

Tensions

Increased contemplation of teacher education has led analysts to identify some significant tensions that affect the quality of training. Below, I outline a handful of tensions that are relevant not only to teacher education institutions but also to teacher educators because they frame the system in which teacher educators' work.

Quality of students

A common problem found throughout the region is the quality of students that enter the profession. In the UNESCO study on Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay, Lopez de Castilla (2004) notes the low quality of students as one of the major tensions falling just below inadequate infrastructure and lack of resources within teacher education. Contributing to this problem are the weak admission criteria and the inconsistent number of years needed to graduate. Many chose the teaching career because it is an easy alternative to other careers that requires less study. Some countries such as Argentina have created efforts to attract quality students. However, there remains a need to establish quality criteria for the admission of candidates into both teacher training institutes and university programs.

Disconnect between Types of Institutions

As mentioned above, teachers are educated in a variety of institutions and often within one country a prospective student has the choice to enter a teacher institute or a university program. A common problem found with this system is the lack of

cooperation or coordination between the institutes and the universities. In the UNESCO report on Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, Pogre (2005) indicates that one of the greatest debates in teacher education is whether or not this training should take place solely in the university setting or in specific teacher training institutes. The debate focuses on the theoretical setting of the university versus the actuality of the classroom. Many feel that universities are too far removed from the classroom and don't give teachers the experience of what they will face. Some countries have brought teacher education completely into the university, Chile for example. Others have kept the two-track systems of institutes and universities while other countries maintain only teaching institutes. The disconnect between the types of teacher education institutions challenges the quality of education received.

Academic demands vs. System demands

There is a contradiction between the importance of education in general and teacher training. Education reforms of the 1990s called for access to primary education for all children living with in each country. In most of these countries, the reform expansions didn't come with an increase in teacher numbers and teacher education until much later, if ever. In general teacher education has little contact with the rest of the education system. According to Pogre (2004), teacher education institutions are trapped between academics and the needs of the system and society. Teacher education institutions have little contact with the rest of the education system and they have little contact with other institutions of the education system, especially those that make decisions and have information about the system. From this we see that teacher education is often isolated

and infrequently considered; yet these are the very institutions that are charged with preparing the teachers who will implement reforms and who will serve as the role models for growing young citizens.

Current strategies

Current strategies in the region address many of the tensions listed above. For example, in Bolivia, the Ministry of Education has signed agreements with the universities that have teaching programs to put them in charge of administering the teaching institutes that are outside the university. These agreements seek coordination between the curriculums of teacher institutes and the curriculum of the universities.

In Barbados, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras efforts have been made to design an instrument that will evaluate in-service teachers. The instrument consists of individual observation, complete visits, interviews, educational evaluation and the pursuit of academic results (Hemispheric Project 2005).

In Ecuador, efforts have addressed professionalism of teachers in a four level process. At the Ministry of Education and Culture policy is designed, investigations are undertaken to determine improvement needs and pedagogical materials are created and distributed. At the regional level, the office of regional professional improvement is charged with planning and programming professional improvement workshops. The provincial level exercises, supervises and evaluates programs on a more local level. Finally, at the institutional level, teacher networks and education establishments execute, supervise and evaluate improvement of professionalism.

In Belize, a *National Education Summit* was convened to design strategies for teacher professionalization. This summit was a response to the realization that only half of all teachers in Belize have been formally prepared for classroom teaching.

In the Caribbean, a "Good Practices Database" has been created. This database identifies criteria of good practices that can be shared among teachers, essentially creating a network of teachers and idea sharing (Hemispheric Project 2005).

Teacher Educators: Factors, Responsibilities and Issues

Though I have found some information on teacher educators, the literature regarding the development and role of teacher educators is scant. Little is known about who teacher educators are and what professional preparation they have received. Yet they are an important part of teacher education. Villegas-Reimers (2003) citing the work of others notes "professional development of teacher-educators is an aspect of professional development that has been neglected, despite many reports that show its importance in the improvement of the professional development of all teachers" (Beaty, 1998; Clarke 2000 in Villegas-Reimers 2003, p. 134).

Several fundamental factors need to be investigated in order to understand teacher educators and their role. First we need to better understand their attitudes and understanding of the ethical principles that underlie teaching. What do they believe teaching to be? Where have they learned these principles? Second, we need to understand how teacher educators study themselves to improve their own practices and role in preparing new teachers (Chin & Russell 1998; Cole & Knowles 1998; Abt-Perkins 1998 in Villegas-Reimers 2003). What measures, if any, do teacher educators take to check

their own teaching, to improve their own practices? Finally, McCalle (1998) and Chin & Russell(1998) suggest that we need to understand the relationship between professional development of teacher educators, teachers and education reforms (in Villegas-Reimers 2003). How do teacher educators make sense of their own professional role in relation to training new teachers in education reform?

Understanding and profiling teacher educators are only half of the battle. To fully grasp the nature of teacher educators, we must take into account the responsibilities given to teacher educators. Villegas-Reimers (2003) suggests "schools, teacher-preparation institutions and related institutions must work collaboratively to ensure development of teachers from beginning of their career" (p. 140). However, as noted above, these institutions rarely work together or communicate with one another. How, then, is a teacher educator suppose to take on the responsibilities of ensuring full development of new teachers if she and her own institution are 'out of the loop'? What resources and support can teacher educators expect from her own institution to ensure that she is doing the best she can to train the next generation of teachers? In other words, to be able to understand the responsibilities of teacher educators, we must first understand the circumstances in which they work.

Finally, we must also understand the issues that face teacher educators. These issues are the same issues that face teacher education institutions, however, they take on a deeper meaning. In order to teach new teachers, educators must first understand the issues that face education and teacher and be prepared to teach about them. Examples of such issues are listed here:

- Relation between theory and practice/society pedagogy
- Respond to realities of politics and socioeconomic change

- Teacher support in the classroom
- Poor level of student quality
- Understanding mixed indigenous and modern societies
- Education for a modern society
- Teaching democracy
- Preparing for professionalization

The question then becomes, who trains the teacher educators about reform or current issues that face teachers? Understanding how, if at all, teacher educators learn to teach these issues will aid us in understanding how teachers teach in the classroom.

Looking at the factors, responsibilities and issues that comprise the world of teacher educators is crucial to developing and enhancing the training given to teacher educators. The next section will make suggestions as to how we tackle improving the education of teacher educators.

Next Steps

If strides are to be made in teacher education institutions, then logically we must understand and improve the nature of training given to teacher educators. This fact is recognized throughout the region. At the 2003 meeting of teacher education universities in Chile, participants pointed out that "the direct relationship that exists between the quality of the teaching profession and the quality of education functions also for teacher education institutions, even more so as the teachers reproduce their teaching practices in the manner in which they were taught. Paradoxically, this is one of the levels less addressed and absent in the education reforms of most countries" (p. 35).

Hernandez R. (2000) suggested at the *Education and Cultural Coordination of Central America* conference that if we expect to have protagonistic teachers who can

think on their own and make decisions based on specific processes of teaching, then changes must be made not only to the institutions where teachers learn but also to the role of the teacher educator. She suggests that a new concept of education requires a new concept of "teacher" that follows Frierian ideas and methodologies to emancipate and empower teachers while they are in training. Such methodologies would resonate from teacher educators.

A few authors have made suggestions about how to go about mandating what teacher educators should learn. For example, Beaty (1998) calls for teacher educators "to acquire professional knowledge- not only of subject matter, but also of pedagogy; they must develop skills and techniques for teaching; and they must develop attitudes and understanding of ethical principles that underlie teaching (in Villegas-Reimers 2003, p. 135).

Hernandez (1998) also lists a few principles that should guide the education of teacher-educators. They are:

- As the work of teacher-educators has a strong influence on the work of teachers, they should model and illustrate a variety of teaching methods, techniques, and processes; therefore, they need to be educated in pedagogy.
- Processes to prepare teacher-educators must be based on practical issues related to the day-to-day work in the classroom.
- The work of teacher-educators must include not only teaching but also research directly related to their area of expertise.
- They must know and understand the institutions where they work and where their students will work.
- Teacher-educators must know the national education system in depth, and must understand the context in which it is implemented.
- Teacher-educators must know how to work in teams and collaborate in their work.
- Teacher-educators must enjoy teaching. This disposition will generate a positive attitude towards teaching in their students.

(in Villegas-Reimers 2003, p. 136).

These suggestions are valid, however, I would refute that without understanding the nature of, the circumstance of and the needs of teacher educators, such guidelines for improvement of their role cannot be properly implemented. Once we have a greater understanding of who teacher educators are, the challenges they face and how they address a changing environment, we can then address the education needs of teacher educators.

Finally, there needs to be support for the education of teacher educators. Lopez de Castilla (2004) points out in looking at the teacher educator systems of Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay that "the absence of a system of educating teacher educators is common in these three countries. It is because of a lack of economic resources coming from the public treasury for the improvement of education and for the education of teachers" (p. 114). Without support from the national government and ministries, attempting to address the needs of teacher educators is almost futile.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper sets out to map the landscape of teacher education in Latin America and the Caribbean with the goal of better understanding the framework in which teacher educators reside. Understanding the landscape lead us to more coherent definitions of factors, responsibilities and issues that confront teacher educators. It is now our role to go forth with these definitions and context and think about ways in which teacher educators can be brought to the forefront of teacher education, education reform and ultimately national reform.

Bibliography

Abt-Perkins, D.; Dale, H.; Hauschildt, P. 1998. Letters of intent: collaborative self-study as reform in teacher education. In: Cole, A.L.; Elijah, R; Knowles, J.G. (Eds.), *The heart of the matter: teacher educators and teacher education reform*. San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press.

Alvarez, Benjamin & Majmudar, Juliet. (2001) *Teachers in Latin America: Who is Preparing Our Children for the knowledge Century?* LCSHD Paper Series. World Bank; Washington DC

Barrios, O (2004). Hacia un Nuevo Enfoque de la Formacion Inicial. In *Como Estamos Formando a los Maestros en America Latina*. Flores, I. (Ed) (2004).

Bolívar, A., Gallego, M. J., León, M. J. y Pérez, P. (2005). Políticas educativas de reforma e identidades profesionales: El caso de la educación secundaria en España. *Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas, 13*(45).

Chin, P.; Russell, T. 1998. Reforming teacher education: making sense of our past to inform our future. In: Cole, A.L.; Elijah, R; Knowles, J.G. (Eds.*), The heart of the matter: teacher educators and teacher education reform*. San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press.

Cole, A.L.; Elijah, R; Knowles, J.G. (Eds.), *The heart of the matter: teacher educators and teacher education reform*. San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press.

Combs, A., Blume, R., Newman, A., Wass, H., (1974) *The Professional Education of Teachers: A Humanistic Approach to Teacher Preparation.* 2nd ed. Allyn &Bacon:Boston

Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford J. (eds) (2005). *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers should be able to know*. Jossey-Bass:California

Darling-Hammond, L. Wise, A., & Klein, S. (1995) *A License to Teacher: Building a Profession for 21st –Century Schools*. Westview: Boulder

Flores, I. (Ed). (2004). *Como Estamos Formando a los Maestros en America Latina*? UNESCO

Furlong, J., Barton, L., Miles,, S., Whiting, C., Whitty, G. (2000). *Teacher Education in Transition: Re-forming professionalism?* Open University Press: Philadelphia

Garcia, S.; Litton, E. 1998. Beyond burritos and lumpia: ethnic identity as a difference in pre-service teacher education. In: Cole, A.L.; Elijah, R; Knowles, J.G. (Eds.), *The heart*

of the matter: teacher educators and teacher education reform. San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press.

Gertel, Hector R. (2001). *Can Teacher Salaries Policies help to Improve the Social Conditions of At-Risk Populations in the Americas?* Paper presented at the International Meeting, "The Challenges of Citizenship in the Pan-American Integration" (Ottawa, Canada, March 9-10, 2001).

Ginsburg, M. & Lindsay, B. (Eds) (1995) *The Political Dimension in Teacher Education: comparative Perspectives on Policy Formation, Socialization & Society*. Falmer Press: Washington

Griffin, G. & Assoc. (2002). *Rethinking Standards Through Teacher Preparation Partnerships.* SUNY Press: Albany

Hargreaves, A. (1996) *Profesorado, cultura y postmoderndidad cambian los tiempos, cambia el profesorado*. Morata:Madrid.

Hemispheric Project on Teacher Education (2004). Organization of the Americas.

Lopez, Luis Enrique. Development of Human Resources in and for Bilingual Intercultural Education in Latin America; *Prospects* v20 n3 p311-19 1990

Lopez de Castilla, Marta (2004). *Situacion de la formacion docente inicial y en servicio en Bolivia, Peru y Paraguay.* UNESCO

National Academic Recognition Information Center for the UK (UK-NARIC). *International Comparisons CD Rom*. London: UK-NARIC 2003

Navarro, Juan Carlos & Verdisco, Aimee. (2000*). Teacher Training in Latin America: Innovations and Trends*. Inter-American Development Bank: Washington, DC

Pogre, Paula. (2004). *Situacion de la formacion docente inicial y en servicio en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay*. UNESCO

Rust, V. & Dalin, P. (1990). *Teachers and Teaching in the Developing World*. Garland Publishing: New York

Saravia, L.M. & Flores, I (2005). *La Formacion de Maestros en America Latina: Estudio Realizado en diez paise*s. UNESCO

Seminario Latinoamericano de Universidades Pedagogicas. (2003) *El rol de las universidades pedagogicas en a formacion docente: experiencias y desfios.*

Torres, Carlos Alberto (2000). Public Education, Teachers' Organizations, and the State in Latin America. In Thomas S. Popkewitz, (Ed). *Educational Knowledge: Changing*

Relationships between the State, Civil Society, and the Educational Community (pp.83-110). USA: State University of New York Press

Torres, Rosa Maria (2000). From Agents of Reform to the Subjects of Change: The Teaching Crossroads in Latin America. *Prospects*, vol. XXX, no. 2.

UNESCO (1990*). Innovations and Initiatives in Teacher Education in Asia and the Pacific Rim. Vol.1:Overview*.

Vegas, E. (2005). *Incentive to Improve Teaching*. The World Bank

Villegas-Reimers, E. (2003). *Teacher Professional Development: An International Review of the Literature*. UNESCO