

Vocational Guidance for Trainee Teachers?: Some Caribbean Evidence

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***British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 16, 157-166 (1988)**

Guidance in further and higher education is comparatively neglected in many countries. This is particularly true of vocational guidance for trainee teachers. It is suggested that one can no longer assume that such trainees are already committed to a career in teaching. Evidence is offered from Jamaica and Antigua to show that about half the trainee teachers in those territories neither wanted nor look forward to a career in teaching. It is argued that their occupational preferences indicate a need for vocational guidance even as they are being trained for teaching. Finally, it is suggested that this policy is not as paradoxical as it may sound.

While guidance services in general have been extended in developed and many developing nations, their role in further and higher education has not been at the centre of attention. There is, for instance, virtually no mention of vocational guidance in post-secondary education in the 12 case-studies compiled by Hoxter (1981). Vocational guidance for trainee teachers seems particularly neglected. Even now when it is widely recognised in the UK that job shortages have made some such counselling desirable, college tutors have not all welcomed the move, and they have in general been slow to acknowledge the existence of students with other careers in mind. While it could be allowed that trainee teachers might need to know how to offer constructive advice on occupational choice to their pupils, it is usually assumed that they are themselves preparing for a career in teaching, so that vocational guidance for the trainees as clients would be superfluous.

In many developed societies, such an assumption might survive the often deplored attrition of teacher supply, since a good deal of this apparent loss has, until recently at least, been temporary: female teachers dropping out to have children of their own, but prepared to return at some later time. But now 'burn-out', rather than extended maternity leave, is centre stage, and evidence is accumulating of growing frustration among practising teachers: for instance, Moracco *et al.* (1983) found that about half the teachers they studied in an East Coast State in the USA would not become teachers if they had the choice again. It might therefore be worthwhile reconsidering the conventional wisdom.

In the 'third world' also, it is worth asking whether trainee teachers should be offered vocational guidance. Many developing countries have adopted counselling services, though financial and cultural constraints prevent them from being as extensive as the North American or European models (for a brief survey, see the special issue of the *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, Volume 61 No. 8, 1983). In Jamaica, for example, guidance counsellors are officially provided only in government secondary schools and tertiary institutions, although efforts are currently being made to extend some such services more widely (Moriah, 1984; 1986). In 1984 about three-quarters of the institutions involved with teacher preparation had a guidance counsellor. Such individuals have to cover the whole gamut of guidance teaching and practice, so there are strict limits to the exposure individual trainee teachers are able to receive. From informal discussions, it would seem that trainee teachers are exposed to vocational guidance in, at most, two main forms (apart from what they might receive in one-to-one consultations). One aspect relates to guidance about the teaching profession itself; the other to the guidance they might one day give their students. As so often in the developed world, the trainee teachers themselves are not seen as clients for vocational guidance with respect to possible futures beyond the teaching profession.

While official pronouncements still pay lip-service to the belief that the teachers' colleges in Jamaica are there to train teachers, Jamaica perhaps differs from more developed countries in that it has been widely recognised for a long time that this belief does not correspond to the facts. As in many developing societies, teacher training in Jamaica has until recently been almost the only form of publicly subsidised further education accessible to a fair number of people. Schooling in colonial Jamaica reflected the rigidly-stratified educational system of the mother country, with a few academically-oriented high schools catering to the small white or creole middle class, and a quite separate system of primary schooling offered without compulsion to the black masses (for a simple outline that indicates some of the complexity here glossed over, see Whyte, 1977, or, for the English-speaking Caribbean in general, Layne, 1982, pp. 17-24). While the high schools relied to a great extent on expatriate teachers, the widespread primary school system needed cheap local labour. Training for this system thus provided many with an

additional chance both for education and for social mobility. As Miller (1976) has said, the teacher training colleges 'have always functioned, in addition, as the "poor man's secondary school". People trained in these colleges have pursued careers in almost every field imaginable' (p. 63). This avenue was indeed virtually the only one open to the mass of the people, since not merely academic secondary schooling but also what little comparatively advanced training there was in agriculture and other technical areas remained the preserve of the very small middle or upper classes (Turner, 1979a; 1979b).

In colonial pre-industrial societies, this extra function of the teacher training institutions may not have been too burdensome since, *pace* Miller, there was not much for a trained teacher to do but teach. The only occupation comparable in numbers with teaching in Jamaica was the government civil service: in 1861, there were 448 teachers to 624 civil servants; in 1921, 2,178 teachers and 2,521 civil servants, who together with other professional groups made up only 3.3% of the working population (Eisner, 1961, p. 166). With modernisation, however, openings have multiplied for skilled or at least certificate-holding persons. The 'poor man's secondary school' has taken on a very significant role as a step into the burgeoning service sector of the economy, though it must be noted that since Independence several other avenues have been created. Teacher training, however, continues to be one of the major forms of higher or further education available in the island and it also remains the cheapest for intending students.

Jamaica, and the other English-speaking Caribbean territories, can accept this socially significant adaptation of the teachers' colleges since these territories in general subscribe to a 'free market' philosophy and do not attempt to tie individuals to particular positions. In Jamaica, teacher training is free and includes boarding accommodation for most trainees. Trainees are bonded to serve as teachers, and similarly other tertiary students in receipt of government aid are officially bonded to work in Jamaica. But these bonds are easily avoided and often forgotten: when in 1986 the government announced a new charge on students at the University of the West Indies, it re-introduced bonding as if a new requirement. The general dislike for state regulation could be discerned in the apologetic manner in which this latest attempt to bond university students was defended. If it is thought important that educational provision should mirror dominant social values, the introduction of vocational guidance in the teachers' colleges would merely display consistency with the surrounding economy.

Of course, as hinted already, there would be a certain reluctance to acknowledge so directly that an institution set up to train teachers was in large measure doing something else. Apart from a wish to align means and ends such reluctance might arise from the general belief that education is a 'good thing', a belief that is still very widespread among virtually all social classes (cf. Foner, 1973, ch. 4, and Foner, 1979, ch. 7, for the interestingly different perceptions of Jamaican immigrants in London). It might also arise from an equally general perception that more and better teachers are needed. While teacher training is free, the colleges have had difficulty in maintaining their quotas since entry requirements were raised in 1982. Previously five subjects in a local school certificate examination were sufficient for entry, but now four passes in the British GCE O-level at grade C, or its equivalent Caribbean Examinations Council examination, are required. The effect of this change can be gauged from the statistics available on the 1976 cohort of college students: on average a student had 6.3 passes in the local school certificate but only 1.3 passes in O-level (Mitchelmore, 1979). In fact, for several years after the change in 1982, students were admitted to a 'preliminary' year on the old qualifications so that they could be upgraded to meet the new criteria. At the time of the survey reported below, somewhat over half the new intake were in this preliminary year.

This paper presents evidence that supports the picture of the social role of teacher training sketched earlier and suggests that there is a need for serious efforts to provide vocational guidance for trainee teachers. The main source of data is a survey conducted in Jamaica early in 1982 at five teachers' colleges, mostly among the new intake of students. The usable sample (499 out of 527 questionnaires given out and returned) is about 30% of that year's intake throughout the Jamaican teachers' college system and, although not random, it is representative on a number of criteria (for more details of the sample and the parent population, see Brandon, 1983). In January 1983 the same questionnaire was administered to the first-year students of the small teacher training establishment in Antigua, which also serves some of the other small English-speaking islands of the Eastern Caribbean: the 28 responses represent almost the whole of this group of trainees.

Two questions were asked to see how many trainees regarded teaching as their first choice of occupation and how many expected to remain in teaching for about the next ten years. Answers were regarded as very rough indicators of commitment to teaching. Table 1 displays the overall distribution of past hopes and future expectations.

Table 1: % commitment to teaching by territory and sex

<i>1st choice? Expect remain?</i>		<i>Jamaica</i>			<i>Antigua</i>		
		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Overall</i>
No	No	27.5	33.6	32.5	33.3	47.3	42.9
Yes	No	6.6	10.0	9.4	-	10.5	7.1
No	Yes	24.2	13.7	15.6	33.3	21.1	25.0
Yes	Yes	41.8	42.6	42.5	33.3	21.1	25.0
	N =	91	408	499	9	19	28

Perhaps most striking is the large number who did not want to become teachers and who do not expect to remain. Thirteen years earlier, McMillan (1969) had found in a Jamaican sample that 25% would have gone elsewhere, given the opportunity; in 1982, about 48% would have preferred to have done something else. McMillan did not find trainees losing a prior commitment to teaching, and it is pethaps somewhat reassuring that only 9% in Jamaica, and 7% in Antigua, appear to have changed their minds against teaching (a change more than compensated by those changing in favour of teaching). But the point remains that 42% in Jamaica and 50% in Antigua do not anticipate a career in teaching, while still near the beginning of their training process. Even if only as part of a devious attempt to convert the lost sheep, it would seem sensible to give such students some guidance about the world of work beyond the chalkface.

It is evident that a large clientele exists in the teachers' colleges for vocational guidance. Further data from this particular survey show that these respondents are actually in need of vocational guidance, as their stereotyped and often unrealistic aims and preferences indicate. They were asked what occupation they had preferred to teaching and what occupation they expected to take up instead (both questions were of course conditional upon negative answers to the two questions looked at above). In Jamaica, 228 students answered the former question, but only 164 answered the latter (78% of those not expecting to remain in teaching); in Antigua, the figures were 18 and 14 respectively. The major findings are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Rank ordering of occupations chosen as first choice and future careers by trainee teachers

<i>First choice</i>		<i>Future</i>		<i>Consistent choices</i>
Nursing	84 (3)	Social work	24	8
Business	18	Business	18 (1)	4
		Nursing	18	8
Social work	16 (1)			
Dietician	16			
Agriculture	12			
Media/arts	11 (1)			
Accountancy	9	Accountancy	9 (1)	4
Journalism	9	Dietician	9 (1)	7
		Media/arts	8 (1)	6
		Psychology	8 (1)	1
Lab technician	7 (1)	Journalism	7	3
Law	7			
Hotel/catering	6 (1)			
Doctor/dentist	5	(Further study	5)	
Psychology	4 (2)	(Housewife	4 (1))	
Computing	4	Computing	4	2
Pharmacy	4	Insurance	4	
		Fashion	4	
		Guidance	4	
		Lab technician	3 (1)	2
		Hotel/catering	3	2
		Doctor/dentist	3	1
Hostess	3	Hostess	3	
Army/police	3	Secretary	3 (1)	

		Bank teller	3	
		Self-employed	3	
Secretary	2 (3)	Law	2 (1)	1
Vet	2	Agriculture	2	2
Languages	2	Languages	2	1
		Engineering	2	1
		Lecturer	2	
		Biologist	2	
		Tourism	2	

Note: Only occupations mentioned more than once are listed; classifications are mostly as respondents offered them. The figures after the occupation are the number of times chosen in the Jamaican sample; figures in parentheses are the figures for Antigua; the final column records the number of Jamaican respondents choosing the same career under both headings. In Jamaica, five respondents offered two occupations in preference to teaching.

When we examine the occupations offered as preferred first choice, the locally expected favourite (given the large female majority) wins hands down: nursing received 84 votes in Jamaica (36% of those answering) and came equal top of the very small poll in Antigua. Given the contemporaneous crisis in nursing enrolments in Jamaica, it is perhaps significant that ten Jamaicans said they were at a teacher training institution because they had been offered a place in one before they had received a reply from the nursing school (likewise one respondent in Antigua). These trainees, however, might not have been accepted into the nursing schools. Although the entry requirements for nursing are not very different from those for the teachers' colleges, they are just rigorous enough to turn the scales: 15 of the Jamaican group said they lacked the right qualifications for nursing, 8 said simply that 'they didn't get through', and another 32 put their not doing nursing down to an unspecified lack of opportunity. It should be noted that about half the sample were not in fact yet being trained as teachers: they were at the colleges for the preliminary, qualifying year mentioned earlier since the entry requirements for teacher training had just then been made virtually identical with those for nursing. Given the fact that nursing and teaching are in the same broad status bracket in Jamaica, it is not surprising that only 18 mentioned nursing as a future career.

The fall-off from nursing as a future alternative to the classroom was somewhat made up for by social work, and in general the commitment to useful service to others remained strong in those offering future occupations: dieticians, applied psychology, guidance, and the prestigious doctors and dentists all got a mention. Yet while their motives might be laudable, many such respondents, betrayed a serious lack of awareness of the real possibilities around them. Current manpower estimates are hard to come by, but it is doubtful that Jamaica could absorb dieticians in the numbers the sample supposes, and the entry requirements and competition for places in high-level medical careers are such that the aspiring doctors, dentists, vets, and possibly child psychologists are living in a fantasy world (the same must almost certainly be said for the would-be lawyers, computer people and accountants; and with only one newspaper company, one wonders where the seven prospective journalists would find their niche). Of course, where there's a will, and commensurate effort and ability, such careers are possible; but given the normal standards in the colleges, and the comparative lack of local opportunities,¹ most of these visions should be regarded as premature, if not unrealistic. This is perhaps even more disconcerting because these students are a few years older than their counterparts in the developed world would be — the 1976 cohort, for whom detailed figures are available, had an average age of 22.0 years on entry (Mitchelmore, 1979) — and have, in general, spent several years outside the classroom, time in which one might expect the real world to have impinged on their aspirations. Unfortunately the students in the sample were not asked how they had occupied themselves before college, but 30% of the 1976 cohort had been in employment, 8% as teachers. As one would expect, the more highly-qualified group specialising in secondary education had spent noticeably less time between secondary school and college.

The students do seem, however, to have expanded their horizons somewhat. While there were fewer respondents for the question about future occupations than for prior preferences, more occupations were mentioned; and the answers were not the stock responses of the current popular Jamaican belief that school teachers all take up selling insurance as a career.

The meagre salaries and unfavourable working conditions of most Jamaican teachers are a constant theme, both of the teachers' unions and of many concerned letters to the press. Respondents were asked — if they did not expect to remain in teaching — what it was about the occupation that put them off. It was not always easy to interpret the brief answers received to this question, but a fair number made explicit reference to inadequate financial rewards: 63 (30% of those not expecting to remain in teaching) offered unambiguously economic reasons in

Jamaica, as did 8 (57%) in Antigua. Some mentioned the low status of teachers, the bad conditions they had to face in school, the monotony of the job, its mental strain, or an unspecified dislike. Radical disgust (the person who "preferred not to ruin people's futures") was notable by its extreme rarity.

From the data presented, it can be seen that in these two Caribbean islands a large proportion of trainee teachers have no wish to start or continue in the career: the training, and probably a brief stint in the classroom, is a mere stepping stone, a phrase many of the Jamaicans used, or so at least they hope. (It should be noted that for various reasons — the vestiges of bonding, the comparative ease of finding a job, especially for those returning to rural areas, and even a sense of obligation — it is very likely that most of our respondents would in fact start teaching after college: our concern is with how willingly they would be doing this and so with one dimension that affects their remaining in the classroom.) It can be seen also that these students do not display a profound awareness of national occupational possibilities and requirements, although they are in general older than comparable students in developed Countries. There is no reason to believe that this picture is peculiar to the territories studied: Kuo (1982), speaking of Taiwan, cautions against turnover after in-service training noting that the 'diligent teacher-students of the in-service program are most often dedicated climbers of the career ladder' (p.60); and Brizan (1981) reports that 'some 380 teachers, or 58% trained by Grenada Teachers' College since its inception, have left the service' (p. 49). It would therefore seem that counsellors in the 'third world' should explicitly recognise the need to offer vocational guidance to students in teacher training.

But as so often happens, counsellors are caught between apparently irreconcilable demands: 'soft' social control versus the task of equipping individuals to face and overcome their problems. It is a perennial conflict, and one at the focus of concern in the developing world, as Super (1983) has reminded us. In a brief overview of reports on guidance in at least 14 countries, which were all noticeably reticent about its role in teacher training, Super harks back to his 1953 APGA presidential address by reiterating a contrast between 'guidance as a means of fostering the development and utilization of individual abilities, interests, and attainment of personal values' and 'guidance as a means of channeling youth into fields of study and employment that were deemed important to national development and survival' (p. 511). But one lesson from sociology is that the world works in mysterious, or at least unforeseen, ways. Developing countries might actually benefit from student teachers knowing more about the rest of the world of work; it is even possible that their school systems might benefit; and it should be obvious that the students themselves would benefit. While for some countries this suggestion might seem politically unacceptable, it should find a sympathetic response among the 'free market' economies of the English-speaking Caribbean.

The preceding observations and recommendations refer directly to teacher training in a particular developing society. But the phenomenon is more widespread: people exploit facilities for ends other than those for which the facilities were originally intended, and this includes specialised training. In deciding what to do — and, perhaps often more importantly what not to do — counsellors, like everyone else, have to take a lot for granted. It is particularly easy to accept the obvious functions of specialised institutions; especially when one is more part of the 'staff' than of the 'inmates'. Even if the data discussed here have little to say directly to counsellors in teacher education in first-world societies, they may serve to exemplify the ever-present danger of swallowing a society's self-images too uncritically and without empirical examination.

Note

1 Legal and illegal emigration has been, and continues to be, a crucial element in Caribbean life. There are increasing restrictions on legal emigration, but these routes could certainly provide some of the respondents with possibilities unavailable locally. Whether such possibilities would materialise at the levels here hoped for is questionable, given the still comparatively poor levels of achievement tolerated by the colleges. We do not know of published work following up the careers either of teacher college students who enter the profession or of the trained teachers among the much greater number of emigrants.

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Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank the students and principals of the various teacher colleges sampled, and in particular Ms Cheryl Abbott, Ms Lorretta Henry, and Mrs Theresa McBean, for assistance in collecting the data used in this study.

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