



FLORENCE CLEMENT



MARY CLEMENT



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Then and Now: Developing Highly Qualified Teachers

BY MARY E. OUTLAW, MARY CLEMENT AND FLORENCE CLEMENT

The No Child Left Behind legislation has called for highly qualified teachers in today's American classrooms. Historically, the preparation of highly qualified teachers developed along with the growth of the schools in which they taught, and teacher certification changed with the times. This piece reviews routes to teacher certification, presenting a case study of a teacher from a one-room school in the 1940s, with comparisons of past and current teacher preparation.

The recent legislation known as No Child Left Behind has called attention to the need for highly qualified teachers in the classrooms of America's schools.⁸ While the term may be new, the concept has long been a part of the growing educational system of the United States.

The preparation of teachers in the United States has developed along with the establishment and growth of the schools in which they teach. The early organization of schools was along three lines: elementary schools, secondary or grammar schools, and colleges.^{1,5} The elementary schools included the first 8 years of schooling, and the subsequent 4 years were labeled secondary or grammar school. Post-secondary work was available in colleges.

The population of the United States and the settlement patterns as the country

developed directly impacted the development of schools and the resulting need for teachers. For example, the 3 million inhabitants of the 13 original states had increased to almost 4 million by 1790. By 1830, the population had grown to 13 million in 24 states.⁴ The elementary schools, often rural, one-room schools, were prevalent during this rapid growth period. The secondary school development followed and became more available to the larger population during the mid to late 1800s.

Teacher Preparation

Qualified teachers were needed at both the elementary and secondary levels for these schools. The degree or level of qualification was determined through various means, ranging from an examination by a minister to ascertain the candidate's soundness in the faith to a

written examination in subject areas. According to Cubberley,²

the best teachers were graduates of the academies and the rising high schools, and the masters in the larger cities of the East were nearly always well-educated men, but the great mass of the teachers had little education beyond that of the schools they themselves taught.

Programs and institutions designed specifically for the preparation of teachers followed the dramatic growth of the elementary and secondary schools and included the teacher institutes, teacher seminaries, and normal schools. Often, the secondary schools and academies offered a course of study specifically for preparing teachers. These types of preparation ranged from summer school classes to professional development courses offered during the school year to programs ranging from 1 to 4 years long.

Routes to Certification

Individuals interested in teaching as a career, whether long-term or short-term, had several options in entering the field. In the earliest of days, having an interest in teaching and/or filling a vacancy may have been the primary criteria for consideration. Completing the elementary school (typically 8th grade) and completing high school were also standards used in recruiting teachers. Later, states instituted tests that could be taken for certification. The normal schools offered several different courses of preparation, ranging from summer school classes to a 2-year program and later a 4-year program.

As is the case now, the need for teachers then, especially in the rural schools, was greater than the available supply, and school systems sought to fill the vacancies by a variety of means. Historically, all classroom teachers have not come from what might be called “traditional” 4-year college routes to teacher certification. Certainly, in the past some rural teachers were themselves just high school graduates in good standing in the community. The normal schools

produced many teachers for schools, yet some of their students left before completing the program of study and began their teaching careers.

Additional context for understanding the needs in teaching during the 1800s and 1900s includes factors such as (1) some academies did not admit women; (2) some colleges did not admit women; and (3) when a woman married, she often could no longer teach in a public school. These constraints provided another facet to the challenge of staffing classrooms with highly qualified teachers.

Teacher Support and Retention

A relevant issue in schools today is that of teacher support through mentoring programs and administrative structure in schools. The absence of adequate or appropriate teacher support is often cited as a primary reason for teachers leaving the profession. Those teachers who find high levels of teacher support report higher job satisfaction and tend to remain in teaching for longer periods of time.⁶

Teachers in one-room schools dealt with issues of teacher support, particularly when they may have served as the only teacher and possibly as principal or administrator at their school. The support and structure provided by the school system was critical for the teacher in the one-room school with limited supplies and resources.

Even when appropriate support was provided, if the female teacher decided to marry, she often had to stop teaching. This practice gave way when men were pressed into military service during wartime and women continued teaching after marrying, some even filling vacancies left by the men serving in the military. This change was also an element in the shift occurring in the family where women who had previously stayed at home, kept house, and raised the children were needed as breadwinners.

Case Study of Florence Clement, Teacher in One-room Country School

Florence Clement (one of the authors of this article) taught from 1945 to 1947 in one of the last one-room country schools in Morgan County, Ill., which is located in the west central part of the

state. When hired, she had a high school diploma and during the 2 years of her teaching, earned five semester hours of college credit. The college credit was earned through extension courses from the state teachers college in Macomb, Ill., as well as summer courses at MacMurray College, a private college in Jacksonville, Ill. Additionally, Florence attended institute days and was assigned a mentor who taught at another one-room school in the county.

In notes from an institute she attended, Florence wrote that teachers should

1. Have a love of children
2. Accept suggestions
3. Get a master's degree
4. Travel and read widely
5. Go to the city (to learn more, be more aware)
6. Be community-minded
7. Broaden their outlook

While these goals are commendable, and the speaker memorable, there were more topics that a newly-hired teacher probably needed to know, such as how to build a curriculum, how to start the school year, and how to reach all students at their different grade levels. Resources available to new teachers at the time included The Illinois Curriculum and Course of Study Guide for Elementary Schools (circa 1943), Curriculum Bulletin Number Four: Language Arts Area of the Rural School Curriculum Guide (1941), The Grade Teacher (a monthly magazine), and Illinois Education, the official publication of the Illinois Education Association.

The Grade Teacher included a recurring column for those who taught in one-teacher schools. In October 1946, the author of the column, Maude W. Hunter, wrote:

Perhaps the most difficult task that ever confronts any teacher is the job of organizing and scheduling the work in a one-teacher school. This is particularly true where all of the children from the first through the eighth grades have to be taught in one room by one teacher.³

During one of her two years of teaching, Florence Clement had 10 students. All were boys and included one in first grade, two in second, four in fourth, two in fifth, and one in eighth grade. When newly-hired teachers today

speak of academic diversity, they should realize that it is not a new thing. With regard to methods of teaching, Florence has said that she “taught as she had been taught—and read a lot to her students.” She motivated by getting to know each student well, by eating her “dinner bucket” lunch with them, and by rewarding them with games of baseball.

The Grade Teacher contained units for each month, as well as posters and designs that could be copied. There were art and picture studies as well as stories, songs, and plays. Although a photocopier was years away, Florence had students copy the pictures with tracing paper, allowing them to put the original up against the window to make copying easier. She said that the windows and walls were always decorated for the seasons and that artwork went home to families on a fairly regular basis, including hand-made flyers about the Christmas programs. “My Christmas programs were attended by the students’ families, as well as the families in the neighborhood. In those days, a Christmas program at the local school was indeed a big event, and everyone attended.”

Looking through copies of The Grade Teacher, it is easy to see the importance given to certain topics. Healthy eating and hygiene were featured in many issues, as was patriotism, because military forces were still abroad at the end of the war. Interestingly, many issues featured a “Good Neighbor Unit” on a country in the world, and each spring magazine was filled with advertisements from the railroads and the airlines exhorting teachers to travel and learn over the summer months. The encouragement of today’s teacher education programs to get prospective teachers out into the world is definitely not a new idea.

In 1938, the National Education Association published *Newer Types of Instruction in Small Rural Schools*, which included the line, “All the studies have agreed that the average rural teacher is the youngest, the least experienced, the most poorly educated, and the lowest paid in the profession.”⁷ Where have we heard such sad commentary? Yes, No Child Left Behind came about to ensure that all children, regardless of their state or district, would be guaranteed a highly qualified teacher. As in 1945, when the

teacher shortage problems of rural areas required emergency certificates to be issued to those with high school diplomas, so too, has the challenge of staffing today's schools created a myriad of alternative routes to certification.

The back cover of the February 1947 issue of *Illinois Education* is a full-page advertisement that reads, "Key to the future...Adequately trained teachers. Announcing...1947 summer sessions at the five state teachers colleges and normal universities of Illinois. Professional training benefits you...and the society in which you live." Teacher training in those summer programs was often offered to practicing teachers who were striving to become fully certified and to earn their bachelor's degree. This is not dissimilar to today's provisionally certified teachers who have an earned bachelor's degree in an academic field and have passed a series of tests. In Georgia, for example, these teachers can begin teaching full-time after passing their tests and can teach for up to 5 years while working toward certification. Like Florence Clement, they take classes through regional offerings and return to colleges and universities when possible to take coursework leading to full certification. Although there is no shortage of elementary teachers in districts with excellent reputations, there are shortages of teachers in certain fields (math, science, foreign languages, and special education) in hard-to-staff urban schools and isolated rural areas.

Conclusion

Teacher educators of today are dealing with how to meet the staffing needs of schools with highly-qualified teachers. Just as in the past, when increasing student populations drove the demand for more teachers, today's changing demographics influence the need for new teachers. The growth of English language learners and the increasing numbers of special needs students present the challenge of educating teachers who can teach those student populations.

National and state policies that are aimed at getting subject matter specialists into schools have created a scenario not unlike that of the past—teacher education candidates with earned bachelor's degrees may leave a program early and begin teaching while finishing coursework.

Those who do not experience student teaching may miss an important component of the apprenticeship/mentoring process. As in the past, a variety of teacher preparation providers is again emerging. Not only do colleges and universities provide teacher education, but regional offices of education and even school districts can provide this training for certification/licensure.

Today's teachers often receive a tightly structured and almost "scripted" curriculum. When teachers are not fully prepared, they may rely upon the standardized curriculum too much, not adding creativity or variety. No matter the student demographics or the curriculum, the bottom line is the same—an effective teacher who meets students' needs has been and will be the critical factor in schools. Teacher educators are aware of all the concerns and strive to educate the best possible new teachers for schools.

What can we learn by studying the past and using it to analyze today's issues of teacher training and retention? Florence taught 2 years on an emergency certificate and then did not stay in teaching. Some research points out that this is still true today, that those without enough training do not stay in the profession. If a state allows non-fully certified personnel to teach in its schools, and if districts must hire these teachers, then they must also put supports in place to help these teachers. The mentoring, observations, and evaluations of provisionally certified employees must ensure that the students' needs are met. A support system must be in place for these hires, as well as relevant professional development. It is certainly hoped that provisionally certified teachers will bring the enthusiasm, work ethic, and love of learning to their teaching that Florence brought to her school in 1945.

(References on page 39)

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Then and Now...

Continued from page 29

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