

Teacher selection

Although the literal meaning of selection is choosing those individuals who are best suited to fulfil a given function, it can also, and this is perhaps its primary sense as far as future teachers are concerned, mean identifying those who will do no active harm.

There are other reasons for selection too. Sometimes it is imposed by circumstances, as when the number of places to be filled in training establishments is limited. Sometimes it results more directly from the desire to open the profession only to those whose philosophical or political options are acceptable to the authorities.

We feel that the first reason put forward is the only justifiable one: to find the men and women who are likely to serve the 'learners' best. Education is the key to man's adaptation to his culture, a path to freedom, the door to knowledge and wisdom. Does it not deserve our full attention?

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But in many places are not bus-drivers subjected to more rigorous selection procedures than teachers? While the former can certainly endanger the lives of a few dozen passengers, the latter can stunt the minds of thousands of children.

Furthermore, while a poor craftsman loses his customers and a bad driver is soon dismissed, in most countries in the world a teacher is often appointed for life without his real aptitude ever having been carefully established. And how many teachers thus appointed by the state will be dismissed for serious professional faults?

In short, there is no lack of justification for teacher selection. The problem is to do it properly.

To select is to predict professional success—the mechanism of prediction

For prediction two things are necessary: knowledge of the phenomenon whose future is to be predicted, and knowledge of the predictors, i.e. the signs and symptoms.

When a layman is asked which is the more difficult to assess, the phenomenon or the predictors, the latter are generally considered the more difficult, if not the only aspect really calling for reflection and research.

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material facts of which we simply wish to announce the arrival: to know whether it is raining or not is easy, indeed self-evident; to predict rain is much more complicated. But as the phenomena become more complex and dynamic, and particularly where man is concerned, the reverse tends to be the case; it becomes more difficult to describe the phenomenon in an operational way than to predict it. This is because once the criteria that enable us to say that the phenomenon has occurred are known, powerful statistical techniques allow a great number of possible predictors to be tried out very rapidly—and without necessarily worrying very much about a direct cause-and-effect relationship—until some are found that are reasonably effective, and the collection or measurement of which is as economic as possible. The procedure of trying absolutely anything as a possible predictor remains exceptional however: a theoretical knowledge of the phenomenon to be predicted generally gives a clue to prodromes, but in many cases a certain empiricism is none the less inevitable, given our limited, not to say rudimentary, knowledge of the human sciences.

Let us take a simple example first of all. It can be admitted that a person is able to read if he obtains a certain minimum score in a set of tests including questions involving decoding, comprehension, etc. In this case, 'able to read' corresponds to a clearly defined criterion. In order to predict how long it will take a child entering primary school to learn to read if his teacher employs a given method competently, we shall try such predictors as exact age, ability to reproduce certain patterns, etc. It is by no means certain that these predictors represent the most important determinants or derive from the most direct explanatory models of the process of learning to read, but, in practice, they prove effective.

Let us now consider the problem of predicting who will make a 'good teacher' or even, more modestly, a teacher who will do no harm.

This forces us to define what makes a 'good teacher' in an operational way, i.e. according to precise criteria that can be directly observed and measured.

There was a time when a teacher was considered sufficiently qualified if he had learnt and understood what he had to teach (and possibly no more than that, as was sometimes required of nineteenth-century teachers) and was capable of imparting this knowledge by applying a codified set of pedagogic procedures centred on the subject-matter that the pupils were to assimilate passively.

Prediction of this kind of ability is comparatively easy. It suffices to recruit candidates who show that they already possess a good deal of the knowledge to be acquired and passed on, can express it in the language approved by the educational authorities and have a command of deductive logic and an orderly and thorough approach. The nature of the selection examination is thus already clear. It just remains to check that the candidates show no infirmity or symptoms of serious physical diseases.

Selection tests of this sort have been in existence for more than a century and are still going strong in many places. Unfortunately their real predictive validity has now become so doubtful that one eminent researcher recently wondered whether substituting the candidates' shoe size for their examination marks would really make much difference.

Certainly an examination of candidates' knowledge is not totally useless. Amongst other things, it can be expected to keep mental defectives out of the teaching profession, but is this not rather a limited ambition? Hundreds of research studies have demonstrated the weaknesses of the selective examinations for entrance to teacher-training colleges or the institutions that have replaced them.¹ At best they predict more or less accurately success in the early stages of training. But even brilliant marks in the final examinations do not by any means herald success in the profession.

In order not to bombard the reader with figures, we shall limit ourselves to recalling the general conclusions drawn from the wealth of practical experience acquired in Scandinavia and the hundreds of studies that have accompanied it.²

For twenty years (1948-68), the tests used in Sweden included writing a dissertation, a test of expression (narrative and descriptive tests), free activities with children and collective tests concerning attitudes towards the teaching profession.

The calculated correlations by E. Malmquist³ between each of these tests and the mark for professional competence at the end of teacher-training studies showed very poor predictive validity.

In Finland, M. Koskenniemi⁴ followed seventy-two teachers from their selection for training until ten years after the start of their professional careers. Here again, he found scarcely any correlation between the selection tests and success in the profession. 'A common trait amongst the least successful teachers was their lack of understanding of children and their inability to structure a teaching situation.'

At the end of their analysis of the Scandinavian results, Marklund and Gran conclude: 'There is no simple, unambiguous "teacher aptitude" existing independently of situational factors. "Unsuitability" as a teacher seems easier to define. Selection for teacher education should therefore be aimed primarily at avoiding presumptive failures.'

But what is a 'good' teacher?

To try to select teachers by means of a test that is relatively simple in its conception and the same for all candidates, is tantamount to saying that there exists one type of suitable teacher, capable of being predicted economically. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In the abstract,⁵ the best teacher is the one who enables his pupils to learn the most in the best way.

But what sort of learning is involved—cognitive, affective or psychomotor, simple or complex, lasting or ephemeral? It is generally accepted that some intellectual processes are more worth while than others. Analysis, synthesis, problem-solving and creativity occupy higher places than memory in the hierarchy of intellectual processes. Attitudes and values are also very important, and many of them appear and form or reform only slowly: the achievement of independence, tolerance, social sense, curiosity of mind, etc.

The teacher cannot aspire to arouse all these learning experiences himself, but neither can he arbitrarily limit his activity to a single sector (which in the past has all too often been that of knowledge).

Certain of these experiences should in any case go together: acquiring knowledge and feeling an interest, a growing liking for the field one has chosen to study.

A vital consideration is that teachers (like their pupils) are never neutral beings, capable of being entirely given over to particular theories or practices—in teaching or in anything else. They are endowed with a personality that is in part invariable, and this personality determines their teaching style to such an extent that a typology can be derived from numerous studies. *Grosso modo* it establishes:

Type X—Interested above all in developing the child's personality, through emphasizing affective and social factors. Follows a flexible programme, without worrying too much about the subject-matter covered. Informal teaching method, as individualized as possible. Warm, friendly.

Antitype: distant, egocentric, reserved.

Type Y—Is concerned only with the intelligence of his pupils. Sticks to the subject. Follows a detailed, logical programme. Sets high standards. Uses very strict tests of knowledge

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Antitype: disorganized, negligent.

Type Z—Stimulating, imaginative. Tries to ignite the spark that will give a few pupils the energy, freedom and skill to express their creative genius. Is not concerned with intelligence in a restricted, traditional sense. Tests are of a somewhat uneven strictness. Reactions towards pupils often dictated by personal feelings.

Antitype: dull, routine.

X, Y and Z are rarely encountered in the 'pure' state; it is rather a question of more or less pronounced dominant traits. X, Y and Z can all be 'good' teachers. Y is the best for imparting knowledge; Z gives more emphasis to understanding. Are X, Y and Z negatives necessarily good teachers? Even this is not certain, at least in certain respects.

Good teacher for whom?

There is not a good teacher in absolute terms, but with respect to a particular situation (including the material to be taught) and particular students. It is exceptional to suit everybody. The teacher is stimulated by huge audiences, while another is only at his best in small-degree seminars.

The quality of learning in a given instructional situation is the result of *particular* instructional procedures employed by a *particular* instructor for *particular* students with *particular* goals in mind.⁸

The conclusion is obvious: there is no single and universal type of good teacher, but many different types, who differ not only from one culture to another and from one degree of economic development to another, but also within each cultural situation, according to the objectives pursued.

An operational definition of the standard types

In the predictive system which teacher-selection represents, we call 'standard types' or 'target types' the descriptions, in terms of observable behaviour patterns, of different types of teacher that we hope to find in schools, or that we are prepared to allow in schools. Unless we can define these target types, selection operates completely in the dark.

Whoever tries to formulate the necessary definitions meets with two major difficulties: the multiplicity of possible models and the serious shortcomings of models defined by means of expected performance.

The multiplicity of models

All the combinations of types X, Y and Z that are to be found in each individual are further differentiated by other personality characteristics of the teachers (including their degree of social adaptation) and by the dynamics of the teacher-pupil relationship. There is thus a virtually unlimited number of acceptable teachers, to the extent that, in the final analysis, each situation, each individual, differs from all others.

In such a case one can only work with very broad approximations, retaining the smallest possible number of general models, within which it is agreed that individual differences do not constitute a 'danger', by which we mean a threat of serious departure from the desired educative action.

Let us imagine one of these models: the X-dominant teacher.

Affective sphere. Easy to approach. Behaves towards the pupils in a friendly way, without undue familiarity, however. Ability to identify, to listen. Inspires confidence, reassuring. Optimistic.

Cognitive sphere. Well-balanced aptitudes: practical sense, moves without noticeable difficulty in the realm of symbols; verbal fluency average or above, social intelligence above average (aptitude in the sphere of social behaviour, in the Guilford model). Knows the subject-matter well, but does not make it the centre of his activity. Attaches less importance to the objective content than to affective reactions to it. Digresses on his own personal experience, even when having no connection with the subject laid down in the programme. Behaviour in assessing the pupils: very subjective; rather lax. Gives children confidence. Encourages children in difficulty.

First remark: a traditional selection examination, focused on knowledge, verbal elegance and ability to solve theoretical problems, will tell us virtually nothing about any of the components of this target model. And neither an interview of a few minutes nor the necessarily brief observation of the candidate interacting with a child or adolescent will provide enough additional information to complete the picture.

Clearly, in order to be able to identify the type of personality corresponding to this model it would be necessary to resort to such techniques as group discussion, attitude scales, evaluation of behavioural intentions, the Q technique and the semantic differentiator.

But two questions are left unanswered by such an examination: Does the information obtained in this way allow the subject's actual behaviour to be sufficiently accurately predicted (measurement of behavioural intentions probably does, but up to now its validity only seems to be established for the short term)? The initial training of infant-teachers starts between the ages of 15 and 18, depending on the country. Can the reactions of an adult in a teaching situation be predicted at this age?

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that we are thinking here of a selection examination

likely to be open to a great number of candidates. Now the example we have just given concerns only one target model, while the examination will investigate candidates not one of whose characteristics is known in advance (and perhaps should not be known, for the sake of equity). Consequently, all the target models, not just one, must be taken into consideration.

One can imagine the duration and complexity of a test covering both knowledge (which is still necessary, let us not forget) and affective and cognitive characteristics (including creativity). This brings us to the chasm that separates the theoretically conceivable from the feasible.

The problem of training and hence of selection in terms of the desired skills

Is there any need to point out the shortcomings of traditional teacher-training programmes in three sections: systematic training in the subject-matter to be taught, general knowledge, and training in psychology and teaching methods?

In some periods—depending mainly on the qualifications of the students embarking on training—and some colleges, the subject-matter and that alone is taught (the teacher being expected to know as much as his future pupils will have to know) or, at the other end of the scale, the subject-matter is only studied at the highest level (on the assumption that if the teacher can master the most complicated aspects of his subject he will surely be able to cope with the most elementary level). The latter approach is adopted by many universities, for secondary teacher-training in particular.

Everything has been said and defended in the name of general knowledge, including memorization of the birth-dates and genealogies of the great men of this world.

Courses on psychology and teaching method consisted in the past—and there are still

some fine surviving psychological notions. The connection between the two has never translated into studying teaching on the social order. Delusions of their implementation, and false lessons and various prefabricated lines condemned and rejected by college lecturers, leaves young teachers than before.

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some fine surviving examples—of memorizing psychological notions (which had no demonstrated connection with teaching and were never translated into action in the field), of studying teaching methods based more solidly on the social order to be defended or the delusions of their supporters than on experimentation, and finally of assimilating model lessons and various tricks of the trade. These prefabricated lines of conduct are nowadays condemned and rejected by progressive training-college lecturers, which, in the worst of cases, leaves young teachers even less well equipped than before.

The functional relationship between the different components of this programme and teaching proficiency is far from proven, but in making student teachers learn a bit of everything the tacit assumption is that they will find something useful in this hotchpotch and that the other things, which are not likely to do any harm, will at least serve to exercise the mind and form the character.

As a reaction against this encyclopedic impressionism, and more particularly under the influence of behaviourism, attempts have recently been made to work out training programmes directly related to the desired teaching skills and performances, in both the cognitive and affective spheres.

This approach is attractive for two reasons. On the one hand it gives a practical guarantee; at least we can be sure that teachers successfully trained by this method will be able to fulfil the educative functions judged indispensable. On the other hand it avoids the dubious encyclopedism we have just condemned.

In theory at least, it seems easier to devise a selection examination if one has a clear idea of what the candidates will have to do later on.

Nevertheless, training programmes worked out in terms of desired skills have one major handicap. In the first place, it might be feared that while the required skills do in fact meet the present situation, they might lose some of their

importance in the case of economic, political or cultural change. Is one not creating a closed training system, which will not equip future educators to deal with unexpected situations not foreseen by the authors of these programmes?

Flexibility, creativity, divergence, etc., can certainly be included among the desired qualities, but one then runs the risk of reintroducing imprecision, just where the aim was to accept only behaviour patterns rigorously defined in an operational way. In short, either a selection examination in terms of desired performances will be reasonably valid only for a comparatively simple teaching situation (a literacy campaign, for example), planned for the short or, at most, medium term. Or this examination will have to be so complex in order to provide a long-term answer to high educational demands, that in practice it brings us back to the problem of feasibility.

How, then, can selection be made?

A snap selection carried out before the beginning of initial training, or by any other brief examination during training, is a delusion, except where it is a question of checking the candidates' ability to express themselves in a particular way and to acquire knowledge, the object of the education envisaged being precisely to make people assimilate knowledge and express themselves in the same way, with no regard for the personal inclinations of teachers or pupils, or for their individual personalities.

If this is not the objective, then only prolonged observation in a teaching situation can provide the information required for a decision. At first it will be negative, for it is easier to identify counter-indications than positive qualities. For example, individuals who show themselves incapable of communicating effectively or who do not have a positive attitude towards

pupils should not be allowed to become teachers.

To make it possible to discharge student teachers from their course of training without too much heart-searching, even if they are well advanced along the curriculum, it is important that they should be able to receive credit for what they have learnt if they switch to other courses, otherwise wastage and the fear of creating social drop-outs will continue to open the doors of the teaching profession to people who should never have been allowed in. The modular approach enabling students to move from one type of course to another should make it possible to solve this problem in the near future, if present trends are confirmed.

The identification of positive characteristics will naturally lead to acceptance, but does not guarantee satisfactory performance in the profession. Personalities change, enthusiasms die, and the vicissitudes of life often have their repercussions in the classroom, alas.

In the most serious cases, it should be possible to remove unsatisfactory teachers, whether temporarily or permanently, and find them jobs elsewhere.

Assessment of teaching—the key to the whole structure

So long as we are unable to recognize good-quality teaching, or more precisely the various sorts of good-quality teaching, with certainty, the problem of training, selecting and supervising teachers will continue to cause confusion, due to a lack of precise criteria.

And the more pluralistic and relativistic education becomes, taking into account the personality and aspirations of each of the parties

involved, building knowledge instead of imposing it and, to this end, basing itself on individual experience, both material and symbolic, the more numerous will be the acceptable models of teachers and hence the factors to consider when assessing them.

But that is a different story—and at the same time the same one.

Notes

1. We could have recalled first of all the difficulty that already exists in predicting success in higher education on the basis of results obtained at the end of secondary education or in university entrance examinations. See Ingenkamp, *Pädagogische Diagnostik*, Weinheim, Beltz, 1975.
2. See S. Marklund and B. Gran, *New Patterns of Teacher Education and Tasks. Country Experience: Sweden*, Paris, OECD, 1974, pp. 69 et seq.
3. E. Malmquist, *Lämplighetsproven, Pedagogiska Skrifter* (Göteborg), No. 218, 1956.
4. M. Koskenniemi, *The Development of Young Elementary School Teachers, Acad. Sci. Fenn.* (Helsinki), No. 138, 1965.
5. The argument that follows is borrowed from our study, 'L'évaluation des enseignants', in M. Debesse and G. Mialaret (eds.), *Traité des sciences pédagogiques*, VII, pp. 112-13, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1978.
6. Cf. D. G. Ryans, *Characteristics of Teachers*, Washington, D.C., American Council on Education, 1960.
B. Rosenshine, *Teaching Behaviours and Student Achievement*, London, NFER, 1971.
T. N. Postlethwaite, *L'éducation des maîtres et l'efficacité des maîtres*, Paris, IIEP, 1974. (Mimeo.)
7. D. Solomon et al., *Teacher Behavior and Student Learning, Journal of Educational Psychology*, No. 55, 1964, pp. 23-30.
8. W. J. Popham, 'The Performance Test: A New Approach to the Assessment of Teaching Proficiency', *Journal of Teacher Education*, No. 19, 1968, pp. 216-22.