The Identification of Content in Teacher Education

by *Helga Thomas* (W. Berlin)

This paper aims to provide some guidelines for a research design on the identification of content in teacher training and to stimulate discussion on this kind of approach. The outline of a study given is deliberately unsophisticated, and is in itself a very personal result of the frustrating reading of hundreds of articles and studies on teacher training, their often irrelevant approaches and definitions of variables, their meaningless results. Examples bearing out this criticism will be given below, not for their own sake, but in order to raise some questions about the discrepancies between the amount of ongoing discussion on teacher training and the hitherto rather poorly known effects of changes in teacher training.

One of the major problems in dealing with teacher training programs is the fact that we know very little about the possible effects of training, of professional socialization as such, especially in a field like teaching with its complex demands on the capacity of a teacher to act in a variety of given situations without being directly prepared for all these situations. Moreover it is very difficult to isolate the variable "training" from other effects on teacher competence such as the field of recruitment, i.e. the motives for becoming a teacher and the attitudes to teaching as a career on the one hand and, on the other, the professional situation with its requirements and specific conditions, under which these requirements are to be met. There are numerous studies in each of the three mentioned areas: recruitment—training—professional situation, but, as far as I know, none has tried to relate these three areas of possible influence on teacher competence to each other. It might be hypothesized, that there is a reciprocitive relationship between a given professional situation and the recruitment for this profession. Specific professions and their actual or assumed requirements may attract specific people with conforming attitudes and expectations, i.e. people with a specific behavioural and motivational structure. The conformity in the findings of various studies on students' attitudes to teaching as a profession and teachers' attitudes to their job gives some support to this hypothesis. Stating the relation in this direction we may further hypothesize, that training itself has little effect on the behavior and attitudes of future teachers; it may reinforce preconceived ideas concerning the teaching profession or it may have a selective effect on students, attracting those with conforming attitudes and eliminating students with deviating expectations. On the other hand we might expect that changes in the professional situation and professional requirements will open a new field of recruitment and therefore new possibilities of training.

Whatever the direction of the mentioned relationship between recruitment, training and the professional situation might be, the key problem lies in the analysis of the concrete requirements which the actual professional situation and planned changes

confer upon teachers and, as a second step, in generating hypotheses on the acquisition of the needed qualifications and on the ways of "testing" the effects of alternative training programs and/or different recruitment policies.

Professor Robinsohn has dealt in general with the changing role of the teacher in the context of the changing function of the school in modern society. I refer to his paper for the basic assumptions on the teacher's role and only want to take up three trends which seem to emerge from his analysis:

1. School is becoming more and more a second important field of socialization (after the family), i.e. an instrument of general qualification and selection for all youth.

2. The growing importance of school and the widening of its functions lead to a tendency towards greater autonomy of the school and the teacher's role on the one hand as well as towards stricter planning on the other hand.

3. The trend towards a scientific foundation to school work also has two components

a) science in the sense of rational training and enlightenment and
b) in the sense of rationalizing and maximizing the effects of the school.

Mr. Frech will go further in his paper into the ambiguous character of new functions, taking the research on innovation as an example.

However, leaving aside which of the two aspects of these three broad trends is more likely to develop—the trend towards greater autonomy and competence for the teacher or the trend towards more planning and a much stronger subjection of the teacher's work to external planned curricula, to tests measuring the efficiency of the school's effects, and to external planned innovations —the important idea to be taken into account when trying to analyze the requirements made upon the teacher is the fact that the ongoing changes *are* ambiguous in character. If we do not want school to become a factory, subject to pure efficiency measures, we have to prepare the teacher for this ambiguous situation. The concept of ambiguity is of special importance when trying to define requirements which a given or anticipated professional status confers upon the teacher. Bearing this in mind, it will not be possible to define qualifications exactly in terms of what a teacher has to do in a given situation. Instead, they must be defined in terms of dispositions to act in a given situation in full awareness of its ambiguous character and of its perhaps contradictory requirements. This means that the kind of qualification needed is not so much (or not only) special knowledge but the capacity to analyze a given situation and its implications, the capacity to actualize one's knowledge, to decide for oneself what one is going to do.

The main question of identification of content in teacher training in most of the reform programs concerns what the proportions of academic, professional and practical training should be. But, stating the problem of defining teacher competence as we have done, the main question concerns trying to establish a close relationship between training and actual professional requirements. Recent training programs and studies on teacher competence have focussed on the role concept by trying to analyze areas of teacher competence and to indicate the kind of expertness required in each area of responsibility. For the purpose of this paper it does not seem helpful to rely on one set of the numerous kinds of role definitions. This should be left to a more careful analysis of different school systems. What is of importance in this context is the fact, that most of these role concepts rely on a rather abstract analysis of teachers' functions as they are supposed to be, or actually are, seen by the teacher himself and not as they really are in a given school system This leaves on one side the contradictory field of the professional situation as such, where the requirements of one function may be in opposition to the requirements of another.

The utilization of the concept of "reality shock", developed by research-workers in

Chicago studying problems of young teachers, may help in the analysis of the different factual requirements and hypothetical prerequisities for training. Many of the studies on teachers' attitudes and perceptions of their activities and of their pupils suggest that the students' and teachers' ideals and interests do not match up to what is found in the real work situation, be it an ideal image of the pupil or the unexpected confrontation with the established teachers and their different orientation or with school administration or with the demands of parents (Wagenschein 1950, Becker 1952, Peterson 1964, Whiteside et al. 1969). To give one example: some studies on unpopular job activities suggest, that working with pupils not deliberately inclined to learn range among the most disliked tasks (Gahlings/Moering 1961, Schuh, Klingler 1970, 1971 et al.). Relating this result to a general pattern of motives for career choice (first choice), namely the attraction of teaching because of its direct involvement with people, particularly with children, the possibility of helping young people to grow up, the social importance of education etc. (Mietzel 1967, Müller 1968, Morton—Williams et al. 1963), one might expect teachers to be willing to deal with reluctant pupils, too; otherwise one may hypothesize, that either the contents of teacher training are not related to factual work requirements or that training bears only little effect on changing initial images and idealised conceptions, which in itself may be a result of the poor relation between the training situation and the work situation.

This is of course a very crude assumption which needs to be differentiated when trying to analyze the effects of training content on teachers' behaviour and, vice versa, to identify contents which might exercise some influence on teachers' understanding of their tasks. It may be assumed, that teacher education students will differ in their response to a training program—and to work situations—according to their different initial images, interests and motives for career choice. There is evidence from a number of studies that, for example, some prospective teachers tend to perceive their roles mostly in terms of their subjects while others, especially women, tend to perceive their roles in terms of social values in child rearing, etc. Both groups may later on come into conflict with factual work conditions, whatever the prevailing norms and atmosphere of a school, since subject orientation does not relieve the problem of transforming the teacher's skills and knowledge into learning stimuli dependent on the whole social context of a school, nor does the so-called child-centred approach mean that subject work is of no importance. The dichotomization of subject-centredness versus child-centredness may be in itself an over simplification, pointing more to primary motives and conceptions than to strictly distinctive features of teachers' attitudes (cf. Dickson et al. 1965, Whiteside et al. 1969). But what I wanted to illustrate is this: whatever their primary motives for career choice, all teachers will face the problem of reconciling their initial interests with the factual work situation, and unless we know what types of teachers, with what kind of initial images and interests, face what kind of problems we will not be able to design teacher programs suitable to meet these different needs. Existing studies of teacher training do not provide much insight into the interrelationship of different motives for career choice or the impact of training on these attitudes and the special problems arising in school. Most of such studies have concentrated upon attitude changes experienced by the students on a very limited scale, isolating only one set of variables such as personality factors or motivational factors or specific attitudes of teacher students (cf. Wallen and Travers in Gage (1963), Getzels and Jackson in Gage (1963)) without relating them to the normative structure of the training situation or the working situation or the general norms for schools and their function in a given society. Where an attempt has been made to assess characteristics of teacher education students on a larger scale, as in the comparative

analysis of British and American teacher students undertaken by Dickson et al. (1965), the explanations of differences found are far from being satisfactory for lack of a more systematic analysis of the training situation and its underlying social norms. Thus we are mostly left with studies like a recent one reported by De Blassie in the Journal of Educational Research (64 (1971) 7). In this study the extent to which personality differences exist between 'persistent' teachers with undergraduate training in teacher education and 'prospective' teachers with an undergraduate background in the liberal arts was investigated, utilizing Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire. The results suggested that only slight personality differences exist between both groups of teachers and the conclusion drawn was, that "regardless of the type of undergraduate education a teacher receives . . ., personality structure may not influence his success as a teacher (when success is defined as persistence)". So what? Of course, this was a preliminary study using only a small number of persons (N=64). But what would we know if the trends emerging in this pilot study could be reinsured by a larger N? Does it mean, that, whatever the initial motives for choosing the study career, those who finally do decide to become teachers, from the beginning or later on in their college life, are similar in their personality structure? Does it mean, that, whatever the training situation, personality factors are the key problem and one should try to develop some valid instruments to measure personality in order to be able to select the "right" teachers from the very beginning of their training? I will leave aside the somewhat dubious operationalization of "success" as a teacher with success defined as persistence, which might suggest that those, too, range among the most successful teachers who never in their lives dared to think of a more rewarding job. I just want to hint at another problem related to this definition.

The slight personality differences found in the quoted study were almost exclusively differences between males and females, regardless of the training group they belonged to, and going into the same direction. The females of both groups were not found to be significantly different. These findings might be due to a sex bias in the instrument itself and may reflect basic differences between the sexes; but nevertheless they point, too, to the necessity of taking into account the fact that teaching tends to be more a profession thought of by women than by men! (Morton—Williams et al. 1963; Zinnecker 1970). Studies on sex differences in career choice among students suggest that, in general, men tend to be more ambitious than women. They are more eager to develop their intellectual capacity, more concerned about their future social status, their opportunities for promotion and taking up responsibility etc., whereas women tend to be more attracted by work which is socially useful, which provides opportunities to meet people and especially children, which can readily be adjusted to marriage and family requirements etc. In general, teaching as a career seems to be more suited to the aspirations of women than to those of men.

These differences reflect of course the whole division of roles and labour between the sexes in our society. Nevertheless different aspirations have to be taken into account when devising training programs for a career like teaching which seems to be less demanding on intellectual capacity, responsibility and engagement but which in fact may require much more of these capacities, thus leading to conflicts between initial aspirations and work requirements. For example, it is interesting to observe that most of the teachers engaged in some kind of experimental and innovative work or interested in it are male teachers, the few female teachers of this group being mostly unmarried; this is at least a personal experience gained from participation in a large number of work shops in the Federal Republic of Germany in the last years. Asked for an explanation these teachers agree in saying, that women prefer to do

just their day to day work, trying to save as much time as possible for their families.

But the sex differences between career attitudes mentioned above may also throw a light upon the factual social function and importance or non-importance generally attached to the teaching profession, contrary to the high expectations of the teacher's role expressed in public speeches and memoranda on teacher training. For even if we dealt only with impressions of teaching as a career, which may not represent the whole reality of the teaching situation, the mere fact that a profession is left—without any fights now—to women may point to its lower social importance. From this point of view it may be of some interest to investigate the Swedish situation, where, if I am correctly informed, the teaching profession is becoming more and more attractive for men.

The whole point comes to this: one should carefully analyze the factual conditions under which a teacher is supposed to work in a given society and not so much trust the optimistic views of his role invested in pretentious programs designed by competent and willing but less influential people. Mr. Frech's analysis of recent trends in innovation research suggests that the growing importance of education for societal reproduction tends to lead to the teacher being regarded more as an object than a subject, thus reinforcing the often revealed tendencies of teachers to rely anxiously on seemingly approved rules, on administrative or scientific authorities, on "objective" criteria for their work. Current teacher programs are full of an uncritical view of feasibility criteria (examples are given in the papers of S. B. Robinsohn and K.-D. Mende), leaving aside the real societal development trends to make education an instrument of subjection and the teacher an effective social engineer. I will return to the relevance of this aspect for future studies later on in this paper.

This last outlook leads to a second set of contradictory norms, the analysis of which needs to be included into training programs. We concentrated first upon possible conflicts arising from discrepancies between initial aspirations and job expectations on the one hand and work situations on the other hand. Let us now turn more explicitly to another aspect of the concept of "reality shock", the contradictions within the work situation itself, reinforced by current educational theories. A good deal of more or less scientifically conducted inquiry into the day to day situation of teachers reveals a deep feeling of uncertainty, personal failure and resignation in view of different job requirements, norms or unfavourable work conditions. Such contradictory requirements on the teacher may be produced by

1. conflicts between theoretical demands on the teacher and the realities of work conditions which are not suited to meet these demands.

This may be illustrated by the general demand to treat each pupil individually—with overcrowded classes, overloaded administrative functions, little help by individualized teaching materials, little or no help by teachers' assistants, only small or no reductions at all in the amount of obligatory teaching hours, etc. What seems to be more important in this respect—since these bad conditions might be easily improved by policy decisions if one really wanted to improve them—is the question whether the demand for individualization is compatible with the institutional character of the school and of social norms allowing for individualizing only to a limited extent. It is therefore of vital importance to analyze

2. those conflicts which arise from different requirements not easily to be reconciled, or which are incompatible or not capable of being fulfilled.

Despite the trend towards greater specialization and differentiation of teachers' functions it will not, for example, be possible or desirable to distribute the different tasks entirely among different persons. Qualifying and selective functions, counselling and assessing functions are tightly related. Tests, developed to assess the differential needs of a pupil may be used for