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Pragmatics and pedagogy: counting the context in teacher training

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THIS PAPER proposes that assumptions made about teacher outcomes based entirely on measurements of greatest length, widest breadth of study or highest cost of the teacher training are not always commensurate. Evidence from prior research leads me to suggest that in some cases it is more the contextual situation of training, as well as a specific type of trainee that might well be a major factor in the training and supply of suitable teachers for specific situations. My argument arises from an inquiry into the recruitment and training of Australian teachers who went to PNG during the 1960s. The inquiry was made as part of my doctoral research analysing the place of Australian expatriate teachers in PNG society through their accounts of the experiences of living in that country.

As with my thesis, the information contained in this paper is drawn from both the Commonwealth Government Archives in Canberra and personal interviews with Australian teachers who taught in PNG government schools. The period discussed here focuses specifically on teaching in PNG schools during the 1960s. I discuss three differing programmes of teacher recruitment and training that were conducted by the Education department in that time and overview some of the commentary that has been written about teachers in PNG. From that commentary comes indication that the level of successful outcomes for teachers, in terms of length of tenure and ability to adapt to the different conditions of PNG varied from one type of training and recruitment programme to others.

The context of PNG education in the 1960s

At the end of the Pacific War in 1945, the Australian Government committed Australian taxpayers to what was, ostensibly, 'a policy of social, political and economic development in Papua and New Guinea so that the people would be able to govern themselves and choose their future status', (Downs, 1980, p. xviii). To implement this policy, the Australian Administration took over the control of the education system from the missions, who, until World War II, had been the major providers of schools for the indigenous people.* During the 1960s the Australian government was still in control of what were then the combined territories of Papua and New Guinea. By that time, impelled by the tenets of its trusteeship agreement over PNG with the United Nations, the Australian government was readying PNGns for an eventual move to independence. As Australia was being pushed rather faster out of its status of colonial master in PNG than it had originally anticipated, few indigenous personnel had been equipped by Australia for the administrative functions of government. Consequently it was the task of the Australian administration's education department to prepare an educated elite from among indigenous PNGns. This elite would hopefully ensure enough personnel able to take over the reins of western style bureaucracy and administration in the new nation. This programme of elite preparation replaced a programme of universal primary education that had previously been instigated by Paul Hasluck as Minister for the Territories. One consequence of the tardiness in educational opportunity for PNGns had been that few were educated to a level where they might take up the opportunity to become teachers themselves. Therefore, in the early 1960s the

Administration's change in focus to push PNG more rapidly into the twentieth century via education of an elite resulted in an exponential rise in the number of teachers needing to be recruited from overseas, (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1965). The Education Department of the Australian Administration in PNG instigated three main forms of recruitment. First was to second, or offer permanent employment to, trained teachers from Australian schools. The second was a two year primary and secondary training course for matriculant and graduate cadets at the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) in Sydney. The third was known as the Emergency or E Course - a six month, highly condensed and practically oriented course conducted in PNG for minimally educated trainees.

The recruitment and training schemes

1. Secondment

In setting up the secondment scheme to acquire fully qualified teachers from schools in Australia and other English speaking Commonwealth countries the Administration initially considered it would be difficult to attract teachers into PNG schools. It needs to be remembered that 1960 was the middle of the post war boom, a time when Australian state school enrolments for the entire 1945 - 1973 expansion period rose 155.9 percent across the board, (Thiele, 1975, p. 216). creating a shortage of qualified teachers in virtually all schools in this country. I find it an interesting comment on teacher attitudes towards their situation in Australia that at least two hundred and fifty male and one hundred and twenty female teachers responded to the August 1960 PNG Education Department secondment programme advertisements.

Perhaps incentives offered by the Territory administration - in regards to tax, housing, removal costs, children's education expenses, and increased likelihood of promotion - encouraged the applications. Many more teachers applied for secondment positions than the state education departments were prepared to let out of the school system at the time. Yet teachers from that era who went to PNG have indicated that their most pressing reason to apply for secondment had little to do with pay and conditions. More important to them were the opportunities to escape the narrow confines of their educational organisation in Australia and the chance to challenge themselves beyond those confines. Some teachers I have interviewed took off for PNG directly on the expiry of their three year teaching bond.

For the successful teacher applicants to the secondment programme, three and four week induction courses were conducted on their arrival in PNG. Ostensibly the programmes were to prepare these qualified teachers for the differing cultural situations they might encounter. However, from the example of the 1963 course programme it appears that of the ninety five lectures, one seminar, four 'educational visits', and five film/slide showings for the four week period, only eleven sessions related specifically to the peoples and cultures of the country. Lectures in educational administration took precedence over either introducing the teachers to a world view very different from their own, or, to the disparate cultures they might work among. Although many of these seconded teachers were sent to schools with Australian students, some were to be posted as principals to schools with only indigenous student and they would be working with students who had no prior knowledge of English. Yet over the four week course, eighteen 'English as a Foreign Language' preparatory classes were given compared to the sixteen lectures in 'Government and Allied Topics'. More sessions were given over the control and dissemination of education and its

allied facilities, for example, the first four lectures of the course were: 'The Structure of the Department of Education', 'Administrative Procedures', 'The Australian Approach to the Administration of Papua and New Guinea', and 'The Department of Education'. The question arises as to whether this somewhat expensive exercise in training a group of already experienced teachers was aimed at classroom practice, or rather aimed at making them agents of control in the colonial administration.

2. ASOPA

Beyond efforts to attract qualified, but apparently disenchanted, personnel from Australian schools, the Australian Administration offered paying teacher traineeships taken under the auspices of the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA), at Mosman, NSW. From the mid 1950s, cadetships for primary teacher training were available to eligible Australian or British subjects and were offered at several levels and differing periods of study. Applicants with a university degree could take a one year Diploma in Education course, generally with the University of Sydney. In 1964 this situation altered with the change in focus for PNG education to the training of an educated elite. ASOPA switched to training teachers for PNG secondary schools, with the last primary teachers graduating in 1965. On completion of training cadets went into either PNG secondary schools or were employed as teaching studies personnel. In the early 1960s provisions were also made for selected trainees without degrees to take up a four year university course in secondary teaching.

Superficially, the ASOPA cadet courses in both primary and secondary education for PNG offered teacher training that resulting in their being competent to teach in the diverse regions of PNG with students whose attitudes, background, assumptions and lifestyle differed entirely from those of young Australians. However, to ensure that graduating education officers were eligible to receive the NSW Trained Teachers' Certificate at the end of three years' teaching experience in PNG, much of their training course simply had to be very similar to that of teachers for Australian schools. The curriculum differed in that they were offered some ESL training and lectures in 'colonial administration, anthropology, history, law and geography-land use'. (Dept. External Territories, 1972, p.39). One of the reasons behind the need to train teachers in an Australian system was that the Department of Territories attempted to make the traineeships more attractive by suggesting to the State education departments that they might consider guaranteeing employment to former Territory cadets after a six year service period, as well as crediting them with six years seniority. (Ass. Sec. to Minister, 1960, AAC 60/4427).

It must be emphasised here that not all ASOPA cadets or for that matter, few of the seconded teachers, were destined to teach PNG students. Many were sent to schools that held only Australian students and who were taught an Australian curriculum. Government policy at the time was that Australian expatriates working in PNG, and their primary school age children should not suffer any privation due to their remote postings. Consequently, two very different primary school systems were run in PNG. For Australian and other English as a first language students, were the 'A' schools that offered the same curriculum as any state primary school in Australia. For PNGn students there were the 'T' (Territory) curriculum schools. The 'T' syllabus was specifically designed to cater for students new to the idea of school, to Western based politics, cultures and economies, to the learning of English, and to written languages in general.

A brief overview of the Administration budget for the differing schools is instructive:

On the allowance for recurrent costs, 1965:

'T' Schools - Territory children: 30 pound per capita per student

'A' Schools -Expatriate children: 70 pound per capita per student

(This was against the 1965-6 estimates of an increase in indigenous enrolments of 7,182 and expatriate student enrolments of 340).

Previous year per capita allowances:Books and equipment:

'T' Schools - Territory children : 2 pounds p.a. per student

' A ' Schools - Expatriate children : 10 pounds p.a. per student

Buildings and furniture:

'T' Schools: 2 pounds p.a. per student

'A' Schools: 15 pounds p.a. per student (Johnson to World Bank, 1965, AAC 65/5061).

Given the Administration's policy of placing budgetary emphasis on their Australian students first, there were simply not enough trained teachers to go around to supply the needs of 'T' schools. Also the primary education needs for PNGns continued to rise in all regions. As the contacted areas increased, so to did the number of, and need for, indigenous content primary schools in the highlands and remote coastal regions. As a consequence the idea of the 'E' Emergency Course was born.

3. The E Course

The E Course was originally mooted in 1958. Following the United Nations observations in the UN annual report on education advancement of 1960 suggesting that Australia was not doing enough in regards to educational opportunities for PNG children, Australia's draft reply outlined the recruitment and training campaign the was hoped would answer the critics. The campaign planned to recruit from Australia suitably qualified persons who will be trained at a new teachers college to be opened at Rabaul in October 1960. It is hoped to obtain annually for the Territory of Pua and New Guinea by these means at least two hundred extra expatriate teachers, a large proportion of whom will be posted to the Trust Territory, in general to Primary 'T' schools and should do much to improve the standard of teaching at the primary level. (McCarthy to Minister, nd, AAC 60/4427).

With the UN breathing down their necks, the Australian Administration had neither the time, the personnel, nor the funding to go through the established channels of teacher supply. The E Course was to last a maximum of six months. Not only was the training time to be short, but access to it was set at parameters well below the normal educational requirements, indicating, I would argue, a somewhat pragmatic approach to the delivery of education for indigenous students.

The advertising called for applicants between the age of 18 and 55 who had achieved a minimum Intermediate Certificate or equivalent qualification. They were offered a new

opportunity to 'take part in the Nationally important task of teaching in native primary schools after [a] short training course', (nd, AAC 60/4427). The first course of nearly sixty trainees started in November 1960 at Malaguna Technical High School near Rabaul. Of the fifty five who sat the thirteen examinable subjects, only three failed their final examinations, (Parr, nd). In all nine course were conducted between November 1960 and December 1964.

It was a NSW two year teaching course in 6 months where they cut out a lot of the philosophy and things and it was an extremely practical pragmatic sort of course. And I remember the person who was in charge of the course, he took us for English, but I never remember having any of the English lessons. It was always 'now if you're in the bush and this sort of thing happens, what would you do in that situation?' (Transcript. 1. p. 3)

The graduates were qualified to teach in PNG only. Those who wanted to continue teaching on returning to Australia, would need to acquire further qualifications through entry examinations to the Second Division. Such entry could be gained by external study or by taking courses in Australia on completion of the first three year contract.

The first round of recruitment for the E Course netted one thousand six hundred applicants in September 1960. It was planned that the first group of one hundred and twenty applicants selected would be ready for allocation to primary schools by the end of 1961, and a further one hundred and twenty per annum could be sent to PNG in the ensuing years. As it was, the scheme had gained final approval in August 1960 and the first trainees were at Malaguna in Rabaul by November, then out to the schools by the end of the following April. There were 344 E Course teachers graduating into Administration schools over a four year period.

Commentary

To return firstly to the seconded teacher group. As far as can be ascertained from the often contradictory records, I have estimated that approximately 380 state secondments from across Australia occurred between 1961 and 1971. PNG Department statistics in 1969 show there were 127 seconded teachers in PNG schools at that time, and of these, the majority had been there less than two years and only thirteen more than five years, (Hay to Sec. 1969, AAC 69/1849). While there were teachers who attempted to stay for longer periods than the six year total they were allowed - much to the chagrin of state departments needing the experienced teachers back in Australian schools - External Territories records indicate that there were a high percentage of resignations or 'wastage factors' which were due to various disenchantments with PNG life, which included the perils of cultural isolation and often stressful and disorganised teaching conditions in that country.

For instance:

1964 : of the 27 seconded : 9 resigned that year.

1965 : of the 27 seconded : 14 resigned that year.

1966 : of the 44 seconded : 19 resigned that year. (Hay to Sec. 1969, AAC, 69/1849)

Despite the training and its apparent induction into the PNGn culture they might encounter

in their classrooms or the wider context of their lives abroad, the seconded teachers interviewed for this project recall that they were ill-prepared for the reality of PNG. The question remains as to whether this was due to their lack of acculturation training or whether it was the teachers' reasons for leaving Australia in the first place that was to impact upon their attitudes. Whichever the case, the secondment scheme was a very expensive way to supply teachers to PNG - although of the teachers I interviewed, all secondments returned to Australian schools.

Where the ASOPA course was concerned, the Australian Administration had initially expected a high number of cadets would flow on from each intake. However, figures taken from statistics in the archival records, (AAC 69/1849 1969) indicate a considerable number of resignations by ASOPA cadet trainees in the early years of placement. For example, in the 1961 course, of 58 who started, 42 finished and in their first year in PNG, 17 of that figure resigned.

Year	2 Yr Cadets			Graduate Cadets		Resignations from that year	
	Intake	Finished Course		Intake	Finished Course	2 Yr Cadets	1 Yr Grad
1961	58	42	72%	5	2	17	2
1962	49	42	86%	4	3	15	3
1963	28	25	89%	3	2	6	2
1964	33	28	84%	19	16	5	6

As with many official records, the archives do not provide reasons for, nor discussion of, the numbers who resign, beyond mention of 'wastage factors'. Of three teachers interviewed for my thesis research who also began their careers as ASOPA cadets, all of them continued on as teachers in Australia, with further qualifications gained after their initial training. I have not been able to contact trainees who did not continue in teaching.

There are conflicting views regarding the adequacy of ASOPA's training for PNG. Some records indicate an official view that being prepared for, and taking account of, the PNG people's difference was not an issue. The training at the ASOPA Balmain college had been developed to 'provide some sort of "Territory content" in the course of training'. It was not deemed 'strictly necessary since a well-trained teacher should be able to adjust his (sic) training and methods to the requirements of native teaching'. And in case the teachers needed to be any more aware of the cultural factors of where they were going, it was suggested that 'as good teachers, the necessary "Territory content" could be developed at the end of their training in various ways', (McCarthy to Minister, 1960, AAC, 60/3462). The 'various ways' were not spelled out in the documents, although the course did include a practice teaching component in PNG schools towards the end of each traineeship.

A differing view, from some administrators and teaching staff at ASOPA was that 'ASOPA courses over and above the essential teacher training courses have oriented these students to their peculiar teaching situations', (Dept. External Territories, 1972, p. 15).

Another commentator has suggested, however, that there was a considerable lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers simply because of the inherent lack of knowledge of PNG by teacher trainers themselves. Much of the training was being conducted through the auspices of state teachers' colleges coupled with administrative input from ASOPA officers. Few lecturers had experience of teaching in PNG, an aspect that had earlier induced one lecturer to request leave of absence in order to gain that knowledge first hand. In his view

Cadet Education Officers, with few exceptions have had no experience of the Territory or with native peoples before training, or during the training period of two years. They require detailed and concrete examples of the responsibilities they will be expected to discharge and the difficulties they will meet in their professional work in both technical and human relationship aspects. (Pearse to Rowley, 1959, AAC, 59/2253)

The last recruitment and training scheme I overviewed was that of the E Course programme. This was terminated in 1964, when expectations were that the growing number of local teachers would keep pace with demand. Yet these expectations were not met, and in 1967 Director of Education McKinnon wrote to Canberra calling for the scheme's reinstatement. At that time, of the three hundred and forty four administration employed teachers who had graduated from the scheme, there were still two hundred and twenty nine working in the Territory schools - a considerably higher percentage than was the case for other trainees or seconded teachers. Administrator Hay also lobbied Canberra for more E courses, stating that the

E Course provides a cadre of experienced teachers with longer service expectations than seconded teachers. This reduces staff turnover and increases stability. E Course teachers have taught successfully and made substantial contributions to primary education. E Course teachers trained directly for Territory situation [and] better understand local teachers' problems and are better able to assist than seconded teachers. The value of successful E Course teacher accumulates whereas the value of seconded teacher with experience is lost to the Department on leaving the Territory. (Hay to Minister, 1969, AAC, 69/1849)

Authors from that era consistently echoed this lauding of the efforts and abilities of the E course teachers over and above their differently trained counterparts. Yet this group were the least well educated, had the shortest training, and were less schooled in classroom practice and theory than any other teachers. I do not have any figures to show the cost of their training, but suggest that overall the costs would also have been considerably less than that of other teachers in administration schools.

Two factors that are specific to the E Course training, might suggest some reasons for their success in relation to the other schemes. One is that the entire course took place in PNG, among PNGns and PNGn culture. The expectations for the trainees were that they would teach only PNGn students and the situation of their training emphasised many of the issues they might encounter in the cultural contact that would take place. They had no prior training or practice among non-PNGn students and this, coupled with their comparatively brief training as teachers, gave little time for them to gain any preconceptions about the value of the relative abilities of their PNGn students in any comparison with Australian students.

The other factor I suggest is that during their selection and training it was specifically pointed out to the applicants that they would need to be highly resourceful, not merely in

their classrooms, but in their day to day existence. It was therefore important to select particularly resilient applicants. The resulting group of selected 'E' course teachers, as one commentator of the time reported, 'had a variety of experiences since leaving school and this had tended to give them a very mature approach to teaching... [and an] average age at the commencement of training was 27'. (Lemon, 1969, p. 149).

Teaching in classrooms generally built of local materials and having to make do with absolutely minimal teaching aids was one factor required of this group's resourcefulness. The other was the selectors' expectation that, given their maturity and experience, the applicants would cope with the rigours of cultural, as well as physical isolation. They were to be housed in very basic accommodation and likely to have only spasmodic contact with the outside, Western, world. Both the selection and training of the 'E' course teachers reflected such privations.

While the figures I have mentioned in relation to the three different groups of teachers give some of the picture, absolute numbers in relation to various factors of teacher attrition rates, abilities to adapt to Papua New Guinean conditions, and an overall awareness of the necessity to adopt a cultural awareness of background and learning styles for the classroom are virtually impossible to obtain. However, from this very brief overview of both official and unofficial commentary, the differing outcomes achieved in teacher suitability, pedagogical practice and length of tenure, do not seem to have been congruent with either methodological or economic input in regards to the varying length, apparent quality, and consequent cost to the Australian administration.

My argument is that the 'E' Course teachers' success has little to do with either length or breadth of their training, or the amount of money it took to train them. Rather, it was the context in which they were trained, the sort of people that the Australian Administration tried to select for the training and the expectations that were placed on them right from the start, that made them apparently more successful than others types of teachers. And the point here is that such factors are well worth considering given the current climate of funding cuts to our education and training budgets.

Notes

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** For an overview of Mission related literature, see Peter Smith, Education and Colonial Control, 1871 - 1975, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Papua New Guinea, 1986.

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