Chapter 1: The Changing World of Teachers

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What can one possibly learn that is new about teachers and teaching? Surely, nearly everyone has sat as a student in classrooms, thus most of us have had at least some personal contact with teaching and the professional conduct of at least a few teachers. And for this reason, teachers and teaching may not seem as mysterious to us as the lives and activities of surgeons, psychiatrists, nuclear physicists, or other professionals whom we have never observed.

And yet, how much do we really know about teachers and teaching? On the one hand, teachers constitute by far the largest population of professionals in industrialized nations — numbering more than three million persons in the United States alone — and therefore we have personally encountered only a minute portion of the many different working conditions, challenges, coping strategies, triumphs, problems, and failures of such a huge assembly. And on the other, teachers work within complex, rapidly evolving, people-processing institutions whose features are not always obvious and live lives that extend far beyond their classrooms in space and time. Thus, to gain better insight into teachers and teaching, we must look far beyond our personal experiences.

Moreover, it is important that we gain this knowledge. Most schools and school systems are also open institutions that are supported by taxes. Thus, their goals and policies are subject to parental concerns, public scrutiny, and political debate, and educators often find that they must cope with policy proposals for ‘improving’ schools that are based on absurd assumptions and profound misunderstandings about teachers and teaching. It is vital, therefore, that we learn as much as possible about teaching and how the lives of teachers are conducted — as well as how both might be improved — and make this knowledge part of ongoing debates about the conduct of schooling.

Let us look, therefore, at traditional sources of knowledge about teachers and their work, and at the new contributions to knowledge about teachers which appear in this Handbook.
CLASSIC VIEWS

Classic writings about teachers have generally stressed two themes. Some authors have tended to portray teachers in their official capacities—as employees of formal organizations comprised of social positions that are assigned explicitly stated and agreed-upon rights and responsibilities (see, for example, Ballantine, 1989, chapter 6; Bidwell, 1965; or Katz, 1964). In this view, public schools and the systems that embed them are set up by superordinate political entities ('the state' in most industrialized countries, 'the community' in America). Such institutions are charged with instructing young persons and with providing other, associated services that complement instruction, and they are staffed by persons with explicit titles: school board member, superintendent, curriculum specialist, budgetary officer, principal, school nurse, janitor, and the like.

But it is the teachers who do most of the real 'work' of the school, who bear primary responsibility for instructing the students who constitute the clients of education. And to structure their activities, teachers are given facilities (such as textbooks and a classroom) and are assigned explicit tasks, ranging from responsibilities for reaching curricular and non-curricular goals, to duties associated with maintaining order, protecting the school environment, meetings with parents, leading extra-curricular events, attending outreach activities in the community, and the like.

This first portrayal of teachers tends to undergird a good deal of today's political rhetoric about what might be wrong with education and how to reform it, for it presumes that teachers, like 'workers' in other types of formal organizations, are motivated either by their assigned responsibilities and salaries or by their loyalties to the entity that employs them. Thus, it largely ignores such issues as the unique, moral character of education, the professional training and concerns of teachers, and the actual, interactive processes involved in instruction.

In contrast, a second, classic view of teachers has stressed the realities that are faced by teachers who must contend with what actually transpires in classrooms, schools, and school systems (see, for example, Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, chapter 4; Dougherty & Floyd, 1990, section 4; Lortie, 1975; Sizer, 1985; or Waller, 1932). The latter portrayals focus on dilemmas that are created for teachers by limited budgets, unbending curricula, public disputes about education, diffuse goals for schools, unruly students, and the fact that teachers normally have low status in the bureaucratic organization of the school system.

Central to this second, classic view is the idea that such realities not only pose problems for those who choose teaching careers but also that they inhibit accomplishment of the instructional tasks assigned to teachers (see Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Coleman, 1961; Oakes, 1990). To illustrate, a number of studies have appeared showing how the practice of ability tracking, now widespread in
American schools, debases the effects of teaching for many minority students (Hallinan, 1996; Oakes, 1985). Thus, this view honors the idealistic motivations of teachers and accepts as largely legitimate the traditional tasks taken on by the school, but suggests that the realities of school and classroom life may, instead, pose many problems for teachers and govern what they are actually able to accomplish.

One stress within this view has concerned problems standing in the way of teachers' attaining a true professional status such as that enjoyed by doctors, lawyers, and religious leaders. Persons in these latter professions typically provide services to others, are self-employed, hold advanced academic degrees, set and police requirements for their fields, are presumed to possess 'expert' knowledge, and are thought to be motivated by deep, moral commitments. Teachers typically do not meet all of these qualifications, hence teaching has sometimes been thought of as a 'semi-profession' (Etzioni, 1969). But most teachers are also women, and the other 'semi-professions' identified by Etzioni are also largely staffed by women, so serious objections have been raised to this characterization. Be that as it may, powerful voices have also been raised recently urging greater professionalization for teachers (e.g., the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; or the Holmes Group, 1986).

OTHER VISIONS

Although these classic views have dominated many writings on teachers to date, other ways of thinking about teachers have also surfaced recurrently which provide alternative visions of teachers and teaching.

One such vision questions the traditional tasks of schooling. As suggested above, classic portrayals have, in effect, assumed that the efforts and accomplishments of education are largely focused on the tasks for which those schools were presumably established. In contrast, a contrarian literature has appeared that challenges this assumption (for illustrations, see Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Wexler, 1992). This literature makes use of neo-Marxist insights and suggests that, whether they realize it or not, schools are often responsible for reproducing social class differences. They do this by encouraging students from working- and lower-class homes to entertain only modest aspirations and to train for laboring jobs, whereas the sons and daughters of affluent parents are encouraged to aspire to and achieve professional careers and positions associated with wealth and power. This literature often blames teachers for such outcomes, although a few authors (e.g., Willis, 1977) have also suggested that students, too, have 'agency' and are partly responsible for their willing acceptance of social class differentiation.
Another scholarly vision has focused on role expectations that are held for teachers (see Biddle, Rosencranz, & Rankin, 1961; or Kelsall & Kelsall, 1969). Works representing this vision note that teachers are affected, not only by the rights and responsibilities imposed on them because they are employed in schools, but also by the expectations that they and important others hold for teachers and teaching. Thus, teachers may be influenced, not only by what the ‘rules and regulations’ say, but also by what the principal of their school, curriculum specialists, parents, school board members, or ‘experts’ think, as well as by their own opinions. Within this vision, the professional worth of teachers is thought to be affected by various sources of influence, and teachers are portrayed as thoughtful actors whose actions in the classroom and school reflect rational choices among alternatives urged by others who are important in the educational scene.

A more recent research tradition has focused on investigations of the professional careers and lives of teachers (Goodson, 1981; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). Only a very few studies had appeared concerned with teachers’ lives and careers prior to the 1980s. However, a good deal of effort has recently been focused on these topics. Studies within this effort have represented various research methods ranging from autobiographical narratives written by teachers, to professional biographies, life histories, or case histories composed by others, sometimes in collaboration with teachers, to qualitatively based studies of teachers as they struggle to cope with specific schools and educational contexts. This effort has reflected several motivations on the part of investigators, among them desires to find ways to express and encourage the professional autonomy of teachers, to engage more fully the moral and social purposes of education, to encourage self-directed learning among teachers, to recognize and honor the complex tasks of teaching, and to help defend public education from recent attacks by conservative ideologues.

Yet another tradition has reflected the massive outpouring of observationally based research on classroom teaching that has surfaced during the past three decades (Anderson, 1995; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Good, 1996; Good & Brophy, 1997). As various authors have noted, few researchers had thought to look at the actual events of classrooms prior to the early 1960s, but subsequent years have certainly reversed this picture. As a result, a great deal of evidence has now been collected about teacher behavior in classrooms — about teacher initiation, lecturing styles, responsiveness, differential treatment of students, language use, questioning techniques, strategies for controlling and disciplining students, and a host of other issues concerning teacher classroom conduct — and about the forces that generate differences in teacher behaviors, and about how those behaviors, in turn, affect student conduct and learning. (Chapter 1 of the second volume of this *Handbook* provides a more detailed introduction to this tradition, and several chapters representing it appear in that volume.)
In addition, an enormous amount of research appears each year concerning the demographic characteristics of teachers and students, teacher salaries and other educational finance issues, some of the societal problems that afflict education, and the morale, plans, and achievements of teachers and students. In the United States, a good deal of such research is published by arms of the federal government such as the Bureau of the Census and the Office of Education, but other bits of it appear regularly from educational consortia, non-profit research organizations, foundations, teachers' organizations and unions, and from mass media sources. Similar government and non-government sources generate related information about teachers in other industrialized nations, and additional materials appear regularly from international sources such as UNESCO, the OECD, and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Sources such as these provide invaluable information about the composition of the teacher corps, the supply of and demand for teachers, the conditions under which teachers work, measured student achievements, and other background details needed for better understanding of teachers and teaching.

Finally, the past two decades have witnessed a substantial flowering of conservative political thought, and this has provoked various attempts to restructure or reduce the scope of public education in Western nations. Many of these attempts have, in effect, scapegoated teachers or attempted to control teachers' activities through 'reform' efforts featuring top-down managerial strategies, and this has provoked consternation, disruption, and loss of morale among teachers and other educators. A literature commenting on such events has begun to appear (see, for example, Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; or Berliner & Biddle, 1995), and this too has formed part of the scholarly background for this Handbook.

NEW ISSUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The substantive chapters of this volume not only provide useful reviews of recent research but also make new contributions that transcend those of prior works on teachers. Let us highlight some of these contributions.

Several chapters in the volume break new ground by focusing on the sequences of events in the lives and careers of teachers. In chapter 2, Michael Huberman, Charles Thompson, and Steven Weiland review recent research on the professional lives and careers of teachers. After discussing epistemological issues raised by the several different traditions of research on this topic, they propose models for the stages of teachers' careers, the different paths teachers may take, and the educational and personal implications of those different paths. Chapter 3, by Robert Bullough, examines research on 'becoming a teacher,' dis-
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