

BECOMING TEACHERS

Texts and Testimonies 1907–1950

*Girls' Dept
National School
Birstall
Nr Leeds.*

Feb. 1920

*Miss H. B. Walker was a Student
Teacher in the above named
School from 1914 to July 1918,
when she left to enter a Training
College.*



**Peter Cunningham
Philip Gardner**

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Girls' Dept
National School
Birstall
Leeds.

Feb. 1920

Miss H. B. Walker was a Student Teacher in the above named School from Aug. 1917 to ~~July~~ 1918, when she left to enter a Training College.

During the time she was with us, I always found her to be very willing & anxious to make progress in her work.

She showed herself to be capable of becoming a very successful teacher. Her lessons were prepared with great care & were given in a skilful & interesting manner.

She was attached for short periods to each class, & all the teachers spoke well of her helpfulness & her capabilities.

She is fond of children, & is able to gain their confidence & attention.

I am quite sure she will make every effort to give satisfaction & to do her work thoroughly.

Clara W. Anderson

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADSE	Association of Directors and Secretaries for Education
AHM	Association of Head Mistresses
HMI	His (Her) Majesty's Inspector(s)
LEA	Local Education Authority
NFAT	National Federation of Assistant Teachers
NUT	National Union of Teachers
PES	Public Elementary School
PNEU	Parents' National Education Union
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office
PT	Pupil Teacher
TC	Training College
TCA	Training College Association
TTA	Teacher Training Association

INTRODUCTION

What do the words ‘student teacher’ call to mind? For most of us— certainly for those born in the years since the Second World War—they evoke a simple, even a mundane, image. They describe a straightforward technical designation: simply that part of a teacher-training course involving practical experience in school settings. Understood in this way, the term is descriptive and substantially unproblematical, defining one of the successive stages in the process of becoming a teacher, much in the way that being a child is understood as a stage in the process of becoming an adult. This has not always been so.

The title of ‘student teacher’ has a substantial and unexpected history.¹ In the early decades of the twentieth century, it was not at all the bland appellation with which we have become familiar. It was a contested concept. It was used in different ways by competing interest groups in the pursuit of a key objective, and one which is today once again widely contended. That goal was, and remains, control over the right to define what a classroom teacher should be, and how such a teacher should be prepared for a life in the classroom. In this way, the words ‘student teacher’ meant one thing to the classroom teacher of the early twentieth century, something other to the training college principal and something different again to the maker of educational policy. By the end of the 1920s, this dispute had been effectively resolved, and its resolution helped to shape many of the perceptions of teaching and teacher professionalism which would dominate the remainder of the twentieth century. In seeking to understand and to relate this process, our account will take the figure of the student teacher himself or herself as its central focus.

How should we endeavour to approach a history of this sort? The duty of the historian is to record, as best he or she can, the way in which the past actually happened. But no less important, the duty of the historian is to show that the past is always also composed of resources, often overlooked by posterity but which, in other circumstances, might have set the trajectory of historical development along a different path from that which it actually came to follow. This is not solely a matter of restoring to history some of the lost voices which have been excluded from our educational past, nor is it merely the indulgence of a counterfactual conceit. Rather, it is to recognise that in the work of creating a better future, the past always holds out much more to us than we may at first

imagine. As Raphael Samuel was wont to remind us in relation to the development of the modern Labour Party, the work of those who have gone before always bequeaths more than one tradition to those who follow. If history has a lesson for policy, it is that there are many useable pasts; there are always alternatives.² The banal truth that we cannot live in the past is a handy slogan for obscuring this fact—as, in a very different way, is the more challenging assertion that all history is the history of the present. Neither of these claims will do. We cannot live in the past but neither can we prevent the past from living in us. And if the present always strives to bend the past to its own ends, the past is never helpless in the face of such manipulation. The past may resist the present as well as succour it.³ Opening ourselves to this recognition is not to see ourselves as imprisoned by time, but to understand that the true relation between present and past is always a dialogical one. Each is created, maintained and energised by the other. We may decide that we do not actively wish to take part in this dialogue. This may afford us the comfortable illusion that we have somehow freed ourselves from history. In fact, of course, though we may try to ignore the voices of our potential interlocutors from the past, they cannot be denied and they will never go away. We would do much better wholeheartedly to engage in the dialogue to which history invites us.

With these broad observations in mind, let us now turn to the object of the dialogue which we are about to enter. The student-teacher scheme is a largely forgotten episode in the educational history of England and Wales. We ourselves had little prior awareness of it and were introduced to it in the course of many in-depth interviews with retired classroom teachers who, in their youth, had served as student teachers: ‘And then I became a student teacher.’ Over and over again, the phrase bubbled out of these conversations which constitute, in effect, the formative ground for this work as well as the source of much of its original data. Student teaching comprised a programme of school-based preliminary—in other words, pre-college—training which was undertaken by many of those young men and women who sought to become teachers in elementary schools in the first half of the twentieth century. Introduced in 1907 as an experimental successor to the long-established pupil-teacher system, the scheme was designed to give intending teachers an initial indication of the realities of everyday work in an elementary school and to allow them some opportunity to make their first practical forays into classroom teaching. Though the pattern of the scheme varied from one local education authority to the next, its underlying principle was a common one—to support the transition of students from the secondary school to the teacher training college through the introduction of an intervening year spent principally in the educational environment of the elementary school itself. Critically, this required that experienced serving teachers should be directly and extensively involved in the training process. As an epitome of what such teachers could perceive the scheme to stand for, the views of the Newcastle Head Teachers’ Association, expressed in 1927—near the height of the popularity of the scheme—are as good as any. During the student-teacher year, a trainee

becomes familiar with the conditions and routine work of a school; copies and imitates other teachers at work, and eventually develops initiative; learns the art of preparing lessons, of keeping children busy and interested in their work; gains confidence in his power in securing and maintaining discipline and all that it entails; has a measure of responsibility thrown upon him, for he is in time given charge of a class; and lastly he has entered upon his study of the characters and idiosyncrasies, the cravings and longings of the young people with whom he is to spend so much of his life.⁴

Our interviews with former student teachers shed much new light on how these practical and professional goals were operationalised within the broader context of national and local policy objectives for teacher training. But they revealed more than this. They also began to show that student teaching may have played a significant but previously unrecognised role in the development of much bigger questions of professional identity. In this respect, this book is not simply an investigation of the technical form of teacher training in the early twentieth century. It is also about the ways in which training contributed to the maintenance of stable or enduring images of teachers and teaching. It is about the ways in which training worked towards the transformation of those images. It is about the ways in which teachers and their work were perceived by policy makers and the ways in which teachers and their work were perceived by teachers themselves. And it is about the ways in which the student-teacher scheme came to occupy a major place in all of these controversial matters during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The task of uncovering or illuminating a neglected corner of the past requires no more powerful justification than the historian's ceaseless requirement to understand our shared history better. And upon that elemental goal we should not be unhappy to rest. But it would not be difficult to justify our investigation further on a number of additional grounds, two of which commend themselves with particular force.

In the first place, the story of the student-teacher scheme shows that many of the central questions about the training of the nation's teachers which dominated both professional and political debate from the turn of the nineteenth century, whether in terms of practice or policy, have been very enduring ones. Though in very different social, cultural and political contexts, many of the same questions which framed the teacher-training debates of the early decades of the twentieth century did so again in the corresponding debates of its last.⁵ These were questions concerning essentially practical matters such as the content, sequencing, siting and ownership of training arrangements but which also ramified with the wider issue of the public evaluation of the teaching profession itself. A clearer appreciation of how, and with what results, earlier generations approached and negotiated educational challenges which are closely related to

those we face today is in itself instructive. What is perhaps more valuable still is the degree to which such an understanding may help us to comprehend why it should be that such questions—along with so many others in the area of modern educational policy—have proved, over long periods of time, to be so enduringly difficult to progress. The issues which came together in the inception and the operation of the student-teacher scheme have, in one way or another, taxed all of those who have had any significant dealings with teacher training over the last century. Should the teachers of the people come from the people themselves? Should prospective teachers' first classroom experience come earlier or later in their training regime? Is teaching better approached through apprenticeship under the guidance of a skilled practitioner or through academic studentship in a college setting? Is teaching better understood as a technical process or a delicate art? Is it ultimately a craft or a profession? And how should the business of teacher training stand in relation to the work of the universities? It is against a chorus of conflicting answers to questions such as these that the origins, operation and demise of the student-teacher scheme were played out. That is why a study of student teaching may reveal far more to us than the bare bones of the scheme itself. It opens a symbolic site through which, in one way or another, many of the twentieth century's most cherished educational aspirations have been filtered.

In the second place, the student-teacher scheme survived long enough and on a sufficient scale to be traceable in the living memories of many of those who experienced it, as well as in the archival record generated by those who administered it. The scheme therefore offers an important opportunity to place the evidence of one category of historical sources under the scrutiny of another and quite different category. By looking at both—the spoken as well as the written—we may not only come to understand the common object of both, the student-teacher scheme, better. We may also gain some more general insight into what we might legitimately expect from an approach which engages the past through written documents which are contemporary, but dead; and an approach which comes at the past through spoken voices which live in the present but, in memory, both assert and evoke the past.

The book is divided into three parts. **Part I** comprises a single chapter which elucidates our methodological strategy and establishes a rationale for the approach we have taken in engaging our central research questions. **Part II** examines the student-teacher scheme in terms of policy (**Chapters 2–4**), profession (**Chapters 5–6**) and practice (**Chapter 7**). The developing argument across **Part II** draws upon data derived from oral testimony as well as from the documentary record. It does so incrementally, however, with the spoken voice of the practitioner little in evidence in the chapters on policy, starting to be heard in the chapters on profession and dominating the chapter on practice. This movement is completed in **Part III** where, following a brief introductory chapter, the experiences of a number of the former student teachers whom we interviewed are set within the broader contexts of their professional life histories. Here, we are seeking to follow the emphases that our respondents have applied for making

sense of their own lives in teaching and, in so doing, to set the richness of their own understandings alongside the analysis that we have offered in [Part II](#).

The research upon which this work is based was carried out between 1993 and 1998. It was generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust (award number F. 462E), to whom we are very pleased to acknowledge our grateful thanks. All the audio recordings and interview transcriptions of our many conversations with former student teachers are now housed at the Archive of Teacher Memory at the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge.⁶ This collection, comprising the personal and professional recollections of more than 200 former teachers, is the accumulated product of a number of major research projects, the most recent of which, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, has investigated teachers' memories of wartime evacuation.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the exceptional group of research associates who worked on the Leverhulme project with us— Wendy Robinson, Bobbie Wells and Richard Willis. From the outset we also enjoyed valuable advice and support from Steve Humphries, Roy Lowe, Stuart Maclure, Harold Silver and Paul Thompson. The list of others to whom we are indebted is a long one. We are glad to record our sincere thanks for the wisdom, the support and the encouragement that, in one way or another, each of them has given to us. Thank you to Richard Aldrich, Richard Altenbaugh, Madeleine Arnot, Grant Bage, Carey Bennet, Patrick Brindle, David Crook, Jo-Anne Dillabough, John Gray, Ian Grosvenor, Sheila Hakin, David Hargreaves, Steve Hussey, Martin Lawn, Mark Lofthouse, Gary McCulloch, Donald McIntyre, Terry McLaughlin, Rob Perks, Kate Rousmaniere, Jean Rudduck, Brian Simon and Frank Simon. To Peter Gordon, our series editor at Woburn Press, go very special thanks. Peter's patience and forbearance in the face of so many delays on our part, together with his calm and unflinching support throughout the project have been far beyond the call of duty.

Above all, we thank all those men and women who came forward in response to our press appeals to share with us their memories of the times, more than half a century ago, when they were student teachers. This work would have been impossible without their help, and we dedicate it to them.

NOTES

1. Various capitalised and punctuated in the primary sources, we have chosen the lower case form and hyphenated the term only when used adjectivally.
2. Kevin Brehony, 'Introduction', *History of Education*, 29:2 (2000), p.101.
3. Michael Schudson, 'The Present in the Past Versus the Past in the Present', *Communication*, 11:2 (1989), p.110.
4. PRO ED 67/99, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Education Committee. Report of the Director of Education relative to the Student-Teacher Year. Appendix E, 'Memorandum from the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Head Teachers' Association', May 1927, p.1. See also Peter Sandiford, *The Training of Teachers in England and*

Wales (New York, Teachers College Press, 1910), pp.58–9. In accordance with then prevailing convention, most contemporary documentary sources habitually utilise the masculine pronoun though the very large majority of student teachers were of course women.

5. David Crook, 'Universities, Teacher Training, and the Legacy of McNair, 1944–94', *History of Education*, 24:3 (1995), pp.231–3.
6. Respondents have been anonymised for the purposes of this study and names used throughout the book are pseudonyms. Individual testimonies have been assigned an identification number through which they may be traced at the Archive of Teacher Memory.

Part I

1

PROBLEMS AND APPROACHES

As we set about our substantive historical problem, the elucidation of the student-teacher scheme, it soon became clear in the course of the research that our attempts to address it were raising other important issues which were more concerned with the process and procedures of addressing the question itself. In other words, we were ineluctably led to reflect upon issues of method as well as of substance.

Why should this particularly be so in the case of this piece of research? In the past each of us had written substantial historical studies which had not provoked, to quite the same degree, problems or responses of this sort. The primary answer derives principally from the systematic use of oral history techniques as a central part of the research method for this study.¹ As we gathered evidence, we found ourselves immersed not only in those forms of archival data with which we were already very familiar, but also in the testimony—and thence the lives—of living women and men.² The experience of extensive encounters with our respondents—with texts that talked back to us, to use Patrick Brindle's telling phrase—was simultaneously liberating, challenging and humbling.³ It was an experience which, as we had anticipated, certainly contributed enormously to our substantive knowledge of the subject, but—as we had anticipated far less readily—also raised issues about the nature of the different kinds of evidence that were available to us and the ways in which we might seek to use them legitimately. To put this another way, the inescapably relational or dialogical aspect of oral history—and particularly, of course, the moment of the interview itself—inevitably brought us towards some wider consideration of history as a process of intellectual production as well as discovery.⁴

It is clear that the relation between the types of sources available to us has served in some degree to determine the kind of history that we have produced in this account. In broad terms, these sources comprised, on the one hand, evidence expressed through the written word and, on the other, evidence expressed through the spoken word. The first of these—documentary sources—constitute the elemental raw materials with which all historians are familiar and from which most habitually work. In the case of school teachers, there is an abundance of such documentation, emanating chiefly from official or semi-official agencies

such as the Board of Education, local education authorities, training colleges, teachers' professional organisations and journals, and from local and national newspapers. It would be quite feasible to write a history of the profession by drawing upon this material alone. Indeed, there are a number of such histories, ranging from the older, traditional accounts of Tropp and Gosden, to more recent revisionist accounts such as those, for example, of Lawn and Kean.⁵ But each of these, whether adopting the putatively objectivist position of what Arthur Marwick once dubbed the 'straight-line professional',⁶ or the self-consciously engaged position of the revisionist, shares an important characteristic in common. Each—largely as a consequence of the characteristic nature of the sources—substantially passes over the figure of the classroom teacher.⁷ Because it is just this figure with whom our study is concerned, our approach has necessarily been different. The classroom teacher of the early twentieth century, stolid and substantial in popular stereotype, turns out to be a shadowy and elusive historical quarry in practice, apparently not much given to professional reflection, either in the course of a working life or thereafter.⁸ Written memorials are few and far between. We have therefore used a methodology in which the retrospective recollections of the individual classroom teacher have been centrally important. What are the implications of this? What are the promises and the problems entailed in the recovery of what might be thought of as the teachers' voice?⁹

The promise held out by oral history is as seductive as it is substantial. This is probably why professional views on its use vary so widely. In the optimistic camp we might, for example, wish to celebrate the admission to the historical record of previously unheard oral testimony on the grounds either of its earlier history of exclusion or simply because of its unparalleled richness of depth and detail. On the one hand, these are remembrances which can be seen as opening up an evidential dimension which the existing documentary record was seldom designed to capture. On the other, this is evidence which can be presented as simultaneously vitalised and validated by its elemental status as the intimate record of narrated individual lives. In either case, oral history has the capacity to generate a sense of authenticity which can seem irresistible.

In the pessimistic camp, we can remind ourselves of the range of concerns which have traditionally been raised against oral history as a method. The most important of these have to do with questions of reliability and representativeness.

Questionable reliability is a charge which is often brought against the data produced by oral history interview. The charge rests principally upon three grounds; that such data draw upon the vagaries of individual memory; that they are the products of the present and not, as with the historical document, of the past; and that they are always critically influenced by, perhaps fundamentally shaped by, a conspiring interlocutor wearing the guise of objective historian.¹⁰ The charge asserts that if we wish to know about the past, then we would do well to found our knowledge upon evidence which is consonant with it. We should, to put the matter emphatically, recognise 'memory as the enemy of history'.¹¹ Such a recognition would claim that the latter, at its very least, orients us towards a