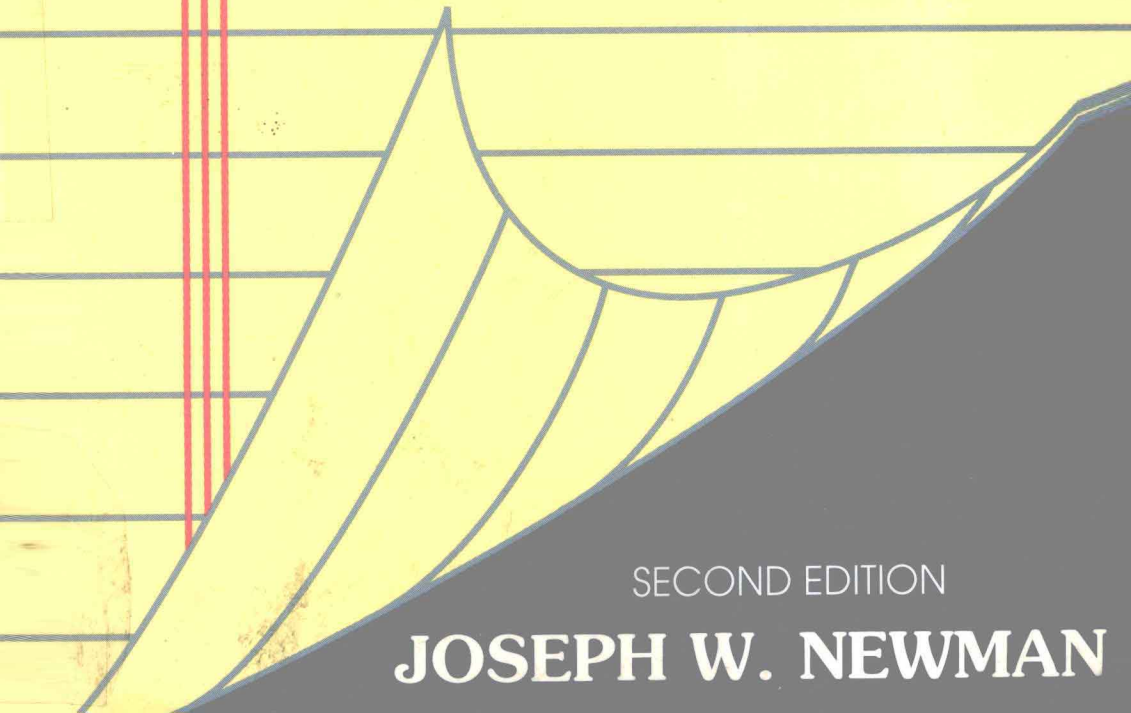
America's Teachers

AN INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION



SECOND EDITION

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America's Teachers

AN INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION

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Longman

New York & London

AMERICA'S TEACHERS, Second Edition

Longman, 10 Bank Street, White Plains, N.Y. 10606

Associated companies:
Longman Group Ltd., London
Longman Cheshire Pty., Melbourne
Longman Paul Pty., Auckland
Copp Clark Pitman, Toronto

Acquisitions editor: Stuart B. Miller
Development editor: Virginia L. Blanford
Production editor: Linda S. Moser
Cover design: Bob Crimi Studio
Production supervisor: Anne Armeny

This book is printed on recycled paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Newman, Joseph W.
America's teachers : an introduction to education / Joseph W. Newman. — 2nd ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-8013-0843-7
1. Education—United States—History. 2. Teachers—Vocational guidance—United States. I. Title.
LA217.2.N5 1993
370'.973—dc20 93-16924
CIP

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10-MA-9796959493

Preface

I wrote the first edition of *America's Teachers* to help prospective teachers see what they're getting into. Having taught Introduction to Education and Foundations of Education courses since the late 1970s, I felt ready by the late 1980s to put down on paper what I had said to several thousand future teachers.

I put *their* words into the first edition, too, hoping the book would come across as a conversation rather than a lecture. I wanted to capture the give and take of a good class discussion—those moments of candor when people take risks and speak their minds. When the discussion subject is American education and when the participants are prospective teachers and a professor who is a former teacher, the exchanges can range from encouraging to upsetting.

I am grateful for the favorable reactions to the first edition. Students and colleagues across the nation have commented on its readability and honesty. I tried to write clearly, and I refused to pass out rose-colored glasses with each copy because I wanted to help prospective teachers see the challenges as well as the rewards of the work they are considering.

As I began work on this second edition, I set out to improve it in several ways. I tried to listen even more carefully to the voices of teachers and future teachers. I tried to pay even more attention to school reform, especially the movements of the 1990s. And I tried to make the book even more sensitive to multicultural issues, a reflection of America's increasing diversity. This new edition combines the organizational scheme of the first with thoroughly revised and updated contents.

Part I consists of five chapters with a depth and frankness that, I hope, will continue to distinguish the book. Every chapter contains new material. Chapter 1 surveys teachers' feelings about school reform and presents the latest information on the job market. Chapter 2 highlights recent trends in teacher salaries and evaluation, including the portfolios and evaluation centers the

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is developing as a step toward a national career ladder. Chapter 3 maps the multiple routes opening into the occupation and analyzes new developments in teacher assessment, including the successor to the National Teacher Examinations. Chapter 4 on teacher organizations and professionalism features a case study of school restructuring in Rochester, New York. New material on academic freedom, particularly the selection of textbooks, highlights chapter 5 on school law.

The four chapters in part II explore the relationship between schools and society in greater depth and with greater emphasis on diversity. Chapter 6 on the history of American education expands the discussion of assimilation, separation, and pluralism with more attention to the roles of ordinary people. Chapter 7 brings philosophies and theories of education to life with examples of current thought, such as Jonathon Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*—a book that is taking critical theory to a popular audience. Recent trends in ability grouping and tracking, desegregation, bilingual education, and gender equity highlight chapter 8 on the sociology of education. Chapter 9 analyzes the local, state, and federal politics of education, now more fascinating than ever with former education governor Bill Clinton in the White House.

Part III focuses on trends that will shape American education well into the next century. Chapter 10 on the curriculum follows the ongoing debate over literacy, including cultural literacy, and tracks the movement toward national standards and national assessments. Chapter 11 brings the book to a conclusion with a discussion of private schools versus public schools, featuring a new section on educational choice.

I hope the second edition of *America's Teachers,* like the first, provokes critical thought and good conversation. I present this new edition to my Rose. I dedicate it to teachers who can transform teaching from the occupation it is into the profession it should be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the following professors who reviewed the manuscript of *America's Teachers,* second edition, and provided many helpful suggestions, which I have incorporated into the text:

Joseph C. Bronars, Jr., Queens College, City University of New York
Harry J. Hadley, Fairmont State College
Susan Mintz, University of Virginia
Gary A. Negin, California State University
Franklin Parker, Western Carolina University
Vince Peterson, Indiana University, South Bend
Robert L. K. Richardson, University of Wisconsin, La Crosse
Peter A. Soderbergh, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge
Jack Stewart, Columbus College

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PART I

Teaching as an Occupation

CHAPTER 1

Deciding to Teach and Finding a Job

Teaching is not a job. Teaching is a privilege. Teachers should be more dedicated to their task—directing and educating the youth of America. We must set examples for young people to follow. . . . I am PROUD *to be a teacher.*

—South Carolina teacher

We're expected not only to teach but to help with the total ills of society. . . . We're overworked, often trying to care so damn much about those we teach and yet see the incredible destruction of their lives due to alchohol and drugs. We're underpaid for our services yet we're still under the shadow of the "3 month" vacation idea. In short we're burning out.

—Washington State teacher[1]

MOTIVES FOR TEACHING

Talking with prospective teachers about why they want to teach is an excellent way to begin a discussion of teaching as an occupation. For more than 15 years, I have asked the students in my Introduction to Education classes to write down their major motive for teaching. Comparing their responses with the results of similiar surveys conducted around the nation, I see several clear patterns.

Why do *you* want to be a teacher? Almost certainly you can give several reasons, but try to narrow them to your major motive for wanting to teach. Now compare your response with those in Table 1.1. If your motivation centers on *students,* you have plenty of company. With remarkable consistency, about half the prospective teachers in my classes link their desire to teach directly to young people. If *academics*—the love of a particular subject or of learning in general—prompts you to teach, you are also in good company. Approximately one-fifth

TABLE 1.1 Why do you want to be a teacher? Motives of prospective teachers.

1. Students
   "I love children."
   "I like working with young people."
   "I want to help students."
2. Academics
   "I enjoy [a particular subject]."
   "I love learning."
3. Job advantages
   "I like having my summers off."
   "My hours as a teacher will match my children's hours in school."
   "Teaching is a good job for people on their way to something else."
4. Social value
   "Teaching is society's most important job."
   "I can improve society by teaching."
5. Influence of other teachers
   "Some of my teachers helped me so much, they made me want to teach."
   "Some of my teachers hurt me so much, they made me want to teach."

SOURCES: This profile is based on my ongoing survey of prospective teachers at the University of South Alabama and on the National Education Association's *Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1990–1991* (Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1992), pp. 62–64; Cassandra L. Book and Donald J. Freeman's "Differences in Entry Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Teacher Candidates," *Journal of Teacher Education* 37 (March–April 1986): 47–51; and J. Marc Jantzen's "Why College Students Choose to Teach: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Teacher Education* 32 (March–April 1981): 45–48.

of the future teachers in my survey give academic reasons as their major motive. Surveys conducted throughout the nation show the same patterns: Student-centered motives top the list, with academic motives running a distant second or third.[2]

Other motives for teaching (and the rounded percentages of my prospective teachers who put them in first place) include *job advantages* (10 percent), the *social value* of teaching (10 percent), and the *influence of other teachers* (5 percent). These patterns, too, are consistent with the results of other surveys. The brief statements quoted in Table 1.1 are representative of the ways future teachers summarize their motives.

Considered as a whole, studies of motivation pay future teachers genuine compliments. Teachers are altruistic; they want to help. Most of them enter the occupation with the welfare of others in mind, believing they can make a difference in their students' lives. Some prospective teachers have been helped—or, in a few cases, hurt—so much by their own teachers that they feel motivated to teach. Some extend their concern for others to society as a whole. Now notice what the surveys do *not* say. People do not go into teaching for the money—with good reason, as we will see in the next chapter. Nor do people choose teaching for the prestige. Americans respect teachers, but it is a peculiar respect—the kind accorded to outsiders, to people set apart from the mainstream of society.[3]

Perceived Advantages of Teaching

Can we take at face value what prospective teachers say about their motives? Aren't some of their statements too good to be true? Based on my work with future teachers, I am convinced that their altruism and idealism are real. But because of what they say outside of class, informally and off the record, I am also convinced the perceived advantages of the occupation pull more people into teaching than the surveys indicate.

Notice the job advantages listed in Table 1.1. Teacher education students often joke, "Teaching has three main benefits: June, July, and August." Of course the summer vacation is attractive, but should it be someone's major reason for wanting to teach? Prospective teachers who admit that it is, along with others who are reluctant to confess, should consider that some school districts have already adopted a year-round schedule, and the summer break is closer to 10 weeks than to 12 in most districts. Taking graduate and inservice courses during the summer further reduces time off. So does "moonlighting." Twenty-nine percent of America's teachers work a second job: Twelve percent hold an evening or weekend job outside their school systems during the school year, and 17 percent find outside summer employment.[4]

Another perceived advantage of teaching is the daily schedule. As more nontraditional students (25 and older), many of them women, go to college to pursue the degrees they did not obtain when they were younger, more students talk frankly about choosing a career that will allow them to spend time with their own children. As a parent, I can appreciate this motive, but should it be first on a prospective teacher's list? Although the nontraditional students in my classes have generally realistic expectations of the occupation, they often underestimate the time demands teaching will make on their evenings and weekends.[5]

Finally, there is the perception that teaching is a good temporary job for people who have other career and life plans in mind. As one student told me recently, "I want to be a lawyer, but I think I'll teach for a while. After all, teaching is easy to get into and easy to get out of." Actually this is an old notion. Historical studies going back to the colonial era show how some teachers (mostly males) have used the occupation as a stepping stone to other careers, while others (most of them females) have used it as a way station en route to marriage and family.[6]

Teachers Who Love, Teachers Who Care

Americans view teaching as women's work. The feminization of the occupation began in the mid-1800s when school boards turned increasingly to women to fill teaching positions. Females had two advantages over the males who had dominated the occupation: The character and personality of women were regarded as better suited to working with young children, and women constituted a cheap, reliable labor force. These nineteenth-century perceptions are with us still. Today 72 percent of all teachers and 88 percent of elementary school teachers are women, and the percentages are even higher in areas of the nation where highly traditional views of sex roles prevail.[7]

Prospective teachers often choose these words to express their motivation for teaching: "I love children." Thus we would expect employed teachers to reflect the same sentiment. The evidence, however, is curiously mixed.