



FEATURE

Was TC really like this?

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Was TC really like this?

John Nisbet unearths a student journal with outspoken views

Education in the North was not the first journal to be published by Aberdeen's School of Education. Forty-eight years ago in 1959 (in what was then Aberdeen Training College), two students in the one-year postgraduate course, Tom Laing and Geddes Smith, started a College journal which they called *Genesis*. They hoped it would be a regular publication, but it did not survive beyond its second issue. Were students more enterprising then than now? In that same year, two other students produced a weekly college newspaper which did come out regularly, under the awful name of *Praeceptor*. I was clearing out my filing cabinet when I discovered a copy of *Genesis* from 1959 – possibly the only copy still in existence. (That shows how often I clear out my filing cabinet.)

What was of interest nearly half a century ago? 1959 was the year when the old Training College (the 'TC') was renamed 'Aberdeen College of Education', and hopes ran high that this signalled a new era in teacher education – except among the students who were cynically realistic:

Names may come and go, but the mistakes of the past seem self-perpetuating. College still suffers under a cloud of Victoriana, none of which is more noticeable as the years go by than the very buildings in which we exist from day to day [in St Andrew Street in the centre of town]... Yet what a golden future could be devised: a new College could be built at Hilton on the site of the present playing fields... (Editorial)

Within ten years that dream was to be realised.

But it is not all so pessimistic. The leading article, written by Peter Clark, then head of the Education Department, declares confidently:

This is the time of opportunity for Colleges of Education in Scotland... Reorganisation and rebuilding will surely reflect new thinking... The content of College courses is likely to change.. The structure of the student population is already changing... It is startling to realise that many who read these words will teach their way into the year 2004.

And not before time, he writes:

The Colleges of today (1959) are breaking with a

past sprinkled with such tawdry phrases as TC, Chapter III, Non-grad, 'My VG' (the way teaching was assessed), and 'My Parchment' (confirmation after two years' teaching).. isolation of the women's hostels, 'free periods', the Janny, the incessant ringing of bells, the separate entrances for 'Boys' and 'Girls'...

Is it really possible that this was what teacher training was like 48 years ago?

The magazine was expertly produced: 36 pages, professional-looking on glossy paper, eight articles, eight pages of news and reports of various sports clubs, with 19 illustrations, several cartoons, two pages of jokes and 12 pages of adverts. There are formal photographs of the staff, the Students Representative Council and the Athletics Association (with Principal and staff in the front row and student representatives of clubs behind).

Genesis was modelled obviously on the pattern of a school magazine – no mention anywhere of research. This reflected the underlying attitude of the time that 'TC' was essentially an extension of school, and those who are old enough to remember it will confirm Peter Clark's description. Graduates in the one-year course almost universally resented this. (I actually enjoyed my shortened course of teacher training in 1946, but perhaps that was just being a student again after wartime years in the RAF: by comparison with these years, College was quite liberal.)

There are some welcome departures from formality among the pages of *Genesis*: a pin-up photo of three 'College representatives in the beauty stakes' -- no names and fully dressed of course, and certainly good-looking in the '50s style. There was a 'news item':

Mr R celebrated the end of the second term by acquiring a car, Mr C by acquiring a wife. Mr C wanted to swop, but Mrs R said No. She wanted to keep the car.

And as 'fillers', what the editors call 'disqualified' advertisements:

SUCCESS THE EASY WAY.
Be an Uncertificated Teacher.
No previous experience required.

Fantastic salaries.
Let the suckers work for Qualification.

DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT
EDUCATION?

You don't?

Then why not join your friends on the Education
Committee?

Stand for election now!

The less frivolous articles included one of special interest by Willam McGlashan, who was retiring after 34 years in College. His 'Retrospect' looks back to 1925, and is unquestionably valuable archive material. It is mostly about personalities who had served on the staff in these far-off years. Dr Edwards, Director of Studies, used an ingenious grooved structure to draft the College timetable, with cards which could be fitted in and rearranged as necessary. (McGlashan once nearly caused total disaster by dropping it.) Edwards gave equal attention to choosing the staff team for the annual cricket match against the students. Jeffrey Aitken, who had the glorious title of Master of Method, insisted that all students present a lesson plan as laid down by Herbart: Introduction, Exposition, Illustration...

He had no place for originality. He held that students could be as original as they liked after they left college, but till then they must teach as he had told them.

A main ordeal for every student before gaining a Certificate was to give a 'demonstration lesson' in front of the Director of Studies and HM Chief Inspector of Schools. Perhaps it is not surprising that the graduate trainees found the TC irksome.

The last article in this issue is headed 'Epilogue', which ends on a kinder note.

An eminent authority in another, lesser establishment (Moray House to be exact) said that TC notoriously fails to command the respect of graduates. This may be true of his own College. It is only half true of Aberdeen. Half of College, any College, is its staff, the other half is its working system. The TC system never commanded the respect of graduates. It did not even command the respect of those who administered it.. But the staff of this College we hold in high esteem.

Admittedly it took us a while to get around to it. It would have taken longer had it not been for a certain "sawed-off" gentleman who hides out on the ground floor, and another, scarcely bigger, gentleman who operates on the top floor. They were the first to overcome graduate hostility, dropping formality from the word 'Go'. College is not very good at formality, and it doesn't go down well in any case. It has all vanished by Christmas, but there is no reason why it should last till then.