

VI. COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education has been a prime area for Commonwealth co-operation for many years. The field of teacher education has featured prominently on the agenda of each of the five Commonwealth Education Conferences and numerous programmes of bilateral assistance, backed by some multilateral activities, have been promoted successfully in the last decade. In selecting the topic of teacher education for this latest in the series of Commonwealth Specialist Conferences, member governments hoped to acquire not only the opinion of delegates about future trends and developments in teacher education but practical suggestions for national, regional and international action. The Commonwealth represents a unique forum for functional co-operation to the mutual benefit of all its members; the success of the past decade in the field of teacher education indicates that there is a potential for further achievement if new directions can be determined and new methods found to meet the likely needs of teacher education in a changing society.

Commonwealth programmes of mutual assistance could be wasteful if they duplicated activities already covered adequately by other agencies. Rather should they be devised in a form and to a purpose which depend for their feasibility and likely success on the unique features of the Commonwealth association, consisting as it does of 32 sovereign and independent states, of all sizes and many different stages of economic development, in all continents, freely associated to their common advantage.

In this context, programmes may be identified to serve primarily short term, medium term, long term or ongoing needs; they might be undertaken bilaterally or multilaterally and, in the case of the latter, on a regional or pan-Commonwealth basis. The broad areas of co-operation may be subsumed under the headings of:

- a) information exchange;
- b) personnel exchange;
- c) training; and
- d) research.

Information and personnel exchange

Information could usefully be compiled and distributed for the benefit of member countries, using the facilities of the Commonwealth Secretariat as appropriate. Specific suggestions for information and personnel exchange include:

- a) A number of directories relating to teacher education, including details of entry qualifications, training facilities and certification procedures for new teachers in Commonwealth countries; the timing of courses and elements within them; training programmes for teacher educators; in-service provision and organisation in member countries; details of conferences, seminars and workshops; organisations with interests in teacher education; compendia of journals reporting relevant research; a glossary of terms relating to teacher education; lists of personnel available for service in teacher education in the Commonwealth; lists of points of reference for information.

- b) A newsletter to carry information about specific events to complement the directories.
- c) Comparative studies of practices relating to the education of teachers and teacher educators; structures of teaching forces.
- d) Direct exchanges of information among organisations and institutions.
- e) Meetings designed for specific education or training purposes, which offer both an immediate return and the opportunity to build an ongoing information system and a more formalised work programme. National and regional training workshops could help to accelerate the introduction of innovatory practices.
- f) The use of expatriate staff. This should be continually reviewed in order to ensure that systems of recruitment are appropriate and orientation courses are given to overseas staff in order to ensure the maximum benefit to the employing country.

Training and study opportunities in teacher education

Training opportunities represent a valuable area of Commonwealth co-operation through links, attachments and courses of varying lengths. Further developments of the third-country training concept could prove of particular benefit, while improved feedback following the completion of training could assist in maximising the effectiveness of training programmes. Additional information should be made available with regard to training opportunities available in Commonwealth countries.

Commonwealth programmes might usefully include:

- a) Links, attachments and short term training courses provide both the opportunity for improved information exchange and in-service training for selected key personnel.
- b) Training for teacher educators: A particular need is for the training of staff to organise and conduct integrated in-service courses as part of the continuing education of the teacher educator, both in formal and non-formal situations. The concept might be explored of a staff college for the training of high level and key personnel on a national or regional basis, to complement the present activities being undertaken in some universities. The college would not necessarily occupy permanent buildings but might make use of the facilities of existing institutions.
- c) Training in management and administration: In addition to in-service provision, special courses in management and administration might be organised on a regional basis for head teachers, principals, inspectors, supervisors and those working in the non-formal sector.

Applied research in teacher education

While the contribution of existing research programmes is recognised there would appear to be real benefits to be gained from the promotion of research projects in a Commonwealth context. In many cases comparative studies and co-operative research on a regional or pan-Commonwealth basis could be of particular value, although considerable practical difficulties could arise in the identification and design of projects. Among the areas which might benefit from this approach there might be included:

- a) studies of non-institutional, para-institutional and extra-institutional methods of pre-service and in-service training for teachers and teacher educators and the training of staff to conduct in-service courses;
- b) the development of non-institutional and partly non-institutional programmes of teacher education;
- c) comparative studies of methods of assessing the performance of student teachers during teaching practice;
- d) the preparation of teachers for work in isolated areas;
- e) investigating reasons for drop-out from the teaching profession;
- f) investigating the relationship between the training process and subsequent performance, attempting to identify the variables which affect performance in the classroom.

More general research projects such as comparative studies of child development might be organised with special reference to their implications for teacher education.

Research in many of these areas might be undertaken on a collaborative intra-Commonwealth basis using small international, interdisciplinary teams, co-ordinated overall by a small representative steering committee working in consultation with governments. Such teams would normally remain in their home base for the duration of the project, meeting at the beginning and end of the project but otherwise communicating through the project leader. One or two selected pilot projects would bring to light the problems in such an undertaking and could lead to the refinement of operating procedures.

Technical co-operation

The tradition of co-operative activity among member countries of the Commonwealth, already long established and well proved, has gained an added dimension by the coming into operation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. This multilateral Fund, to which all member countries now subscribe, is designed particularly to promote mutual assistance among the countries of the Commonwealth through technical aid, education and training. The concept of the Fund has something in common with the Commonwealth Development Bank suggested by the Vice-President of Kenya in his opening address to the Conference.