
Introduction

The Caribbean region as a whole still has some ground to cover in its effort to provide students with a fully trained teaching body. As the drive in this direction continues, teacher educators, educational leaders, planners and all interested in the promotion of quality education must seek to review the curriculum offerings, content and methodologies in the colleges to ensure that they are updated to conform to the rapidly changing condition in the social, moral, economic and physical environment.

(E. Newton, 1995)

The Commonwealth Caribbean Seminar on Teacher Education was not only timely for the region, it also happened when many key facets of teacher education and training were being debated and challenged worldwide. The seminar was held with the intention of making the education and training of teachers more innovative and more challenging with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning. It is clear from the papers that were presented at the seminar and the subsequent discussion that emanated from them, that the Caribbean region provides those who study the field of international education with very clear insights into a number of contemporary issues concerned with achieving better teacher quality.

Five principal issues emerged from the seminar, consideration of which will hopefully make the task of prioritising particular teacher education projects for the region easier.

1 Future modes of delivery of teacher education

A constant thread running through the meeting was how teacher education could be delivered more efficiently to unqualified teachers already teaching, and to newly recruited trainees in colleges and faculties of education. It is evident that changes need to be made in so called conventional training as past trends indicate that too much time is being spent in college and not enough 'on the job', to the detriment of teaching and learning in schools. Developments in countries like Britain, Australia and New Zealand indicate that greater emphasis should be placed on the role of school in training teachers, matching the demands for relevance and greater professional competency in the job of teaching.

The role of distance education in the delivery of teacher education was crucial to the discussion of this issue during the seminar. It is clear from the increasingly successful experience of using distance education in many countries of the Commonwealth, that not only would this form of delivery appear to be more cost effective, but also that it has a salient role in improving the quality of pedagogy in general. It was argued strongly during the

plenary and group sessions of the seminar that there should be a proper debate about the place of distance education in the overall strategy that governments have towards change and reform of teacher education. No longer should distance education be considered as an alternative to the form of training that has held sway for so long. Instead, the worldwide success registered by delivering effective teacher education through distance education should be analysed and applied as part of an holistic policy for improved practice in teacher preparation and, in the longer term, as part of lifelong teacher education.

2 The teacher education curriculum

It was clear from the plenary sessions and a perusal of the country case studies that the curriculum of teacher education must be seen not as a static entity but as a dynamic issue which affects content as well as process. A considerable number of presenters emphasised the need to give all trainees a sound basic training in the content of their teaching subjects. This was particularly pertinent at the primary school level. It was felt that while the methods of teaching still needed to be ones which made learners think about and understand what is being taught, academic content was equally important.

Assessment of teachers, whether in training or in service, also emerged as part of the curriculum issue. It is mostly the case that examination and assessment of teachers in training dominate what is included in the curriculum and how it is presented. New attitudes towards the role of monitoring and appraisal which emphasise building profiles of teacher progress and performance should be introduced into existing modes of assessment.

It emerged that the teacher education curriculum needs to be seen in terms of a lifelong concept, in which during the early training years students would be exposed to areas such as values education, environmental and health issues, aesthetics, the enhancement of creativity and basic research methods. It would be the responsibility of those organising in-service training to see that these and indeed other contemporary issues be followed up in more depth.

However, of concern to many in the seminar was the need to include within the training programme the more immediate problems of how to teach a second language, of how to cope with multi-grade teaching, career counselling, the impact of computer technology in the classroom and how to provide better pupil assessment procedures.

The practicum element in the curriculum was also discussed during the seminar. Almost all papers devoted space to either describing existing procedures, or outlining new plans for making this crucial element of training more effective and relevant. The session on school-based teacher preparation gave some ideas of what new strategies might be adopted in organising a practicum model that is part of a mainly school-based model of teacher preparation. However, assessment and profiling received only a cursory mention during the deliberations. It is clear that more time needs to be devoted to this subject, perhaps warranting a regional workshop.

3 Producing better teacher educators

The quality of teaching was a constant theme throughout the seminar and the role of education and training either were at the forefront of many discussions, or formed a backdrop in the form of participants' questions to issues

such as multi-grade teaching. There was a clear concern that the education and training which teacher educators received may be at best minimal and parochial and at worst non-existent. The concept of the teacher educator as someone who is only employed in a teacher training college or faculty of education excludes the fact that senior teachers, headteachers and inspectors are also in effect teacher educators and should be seen as a part of the total process of training. If school-based training is to have a higher profile in the future and if different modes of delivery are to be adopted for teacher preparation, it seems logical that better training programmes for the trainers of trainers or teacher educators are essential. It was emphasised during the seminar that teacher educators need to update their academic knowledge, their supervisory skills and either improve their competencies for carrying out classroom research or receive initial training in research and evaluation techniques.

There is an urgent need for regional co-operation here in organising 'hands on' training for all teacher educators in the areas mentioned above and other priority fields.

4 Improving opportunities for teacher development

This is part of a greater need to improve teacher quality in the long term. It emerged that while teachers in some countries are given the opportunity to study in countries such as USA, Britain and Canada, it is not feasible or desirable to improve teacher qualifications by having large numbers in overseas locations. While there should always be the possibility of overseas training for middle to senior educational personnel, the bulk of teachers will need to use locally based education and training facilities for their professional improvement. Indeed it would seem that many relevant training programmes are already in existence for upgrading teachers in colleges and university centres in the West Indies. Strengthening these opportunities through conferences and workshops organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat, CARICOM and other agencies provides a much needed boost to teacher development in the region.

It seems, however, that 'spreading the message' by teachers who attend such programmes and workshops to those who are unable to attend is a weak link in the overall chain. More work needs to be done to set up better networking amongst teachers, teacher educators and ministry personnel. Updating and upgrading of teachers should be a priority for all ministry directives which address the improvement of teacher quality. It is not sufficient to regard the job of teacher education as complete after a trainee has been through a successful period of training at a college or faculty.

5 Increasing and improving research capacity in teacher education

The group session on research and evaluation revealed, firstly, that there is a substantive interest on the part of many teacher educators in improving, and in some cases extending, their expertise in carrying out relevant research into teaching and learning. Secondly, that all teachers need to be given some basic training in research techniques and that this should begin during their initial training and continue during in-service. Training should embrace both quantitative as well as qualitative research procedures. But perhaps for teachers the ability to identify problems in the classroom and carry out simple methods of

enquiry in an attempt to solve their problems should be the basis from which training programmes are planned.

It emerged too that more effective and efficient means of communication should be available amongst teachers and teacher educators, about what research is being carried out in different parts of the region. While access to learned journals provides one way of informing the teaching community of recent developments in educational research, more informal means such as 'action research' newsletters, interschool networking and subject association journals, should have a higher profile.

In this book

This document is a compilation of papers presented and the discussions which took place at the seminar on teacher education.

Part 1 consists of two papers, one being an overview of teacher education throughout the Commonwealth and other countries, the other presenting an overview of teacher education developments in the Eastern Caribbean and Guyana. These two papers outline issues in teacher education and how they are being addressed.

Specific developments in teacher education are given in the country papers in Part 2. Teacher education at the University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies, together with in-service activities undertaken by the Caribbean Examinations Council, are also described in this section.

Part 3 is on distance education. This section provides information on distance education activities at both universities and those initiated by the Commonwealth of Learning. It also highlights some of the issues that must be addressed in the development of distance education programmes for teachers.

Part 4 reports on the deliberations on topics that were identified as relevant to the Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean. The topics selected were values education, multi-grade teaching, school-based training and research and evaluation. This document concludes with a summary of group discussions, an evaluation of the seminar and proposed follow-up activities.