
Group discussions

During the seminar, four working groups were formed to discuss quantity considerations in teacher education; issues of quality in teacher education; the teaching/learning process; and, the status of teachers and teacher educators. A summary of the discussions is provided below.

Quantity considerations in teacher education

Participants noted the need for more trained teachers in some of the Commonwealth Caribbean countries. The shortage of teachers is inextricably linked to a wider concern about the management of human resources and is, therefore, affected by policy decisions.

Training needs and the number of teachers required are determined by policy decisions on class size, amalgamation of schools, and expansion of the education sector. Also the policy on expenditure on education will affect the expansion of teacher education activities and recruitment of teachers.

Quantitative considerations in teacher education also include recruitment and retention of teachers which are affected by policy decisions on selection procedures and terms and conditions of service of teachers. Participants agreed that education policies and those related to teacher education in particular should be developed in a consultative process that involves all stakeholders and should take into account the changes in the environment in which education is taking place.

Quality issues in teacher education

Participants addressed the following questions that are related to quality of teacher education:

- What is the governance framework in which teacher education takes place?
- What opportunities exist for on-going professional development of teachers?
- What kind of 'instructional leadership' obtains at the teachers' colleges?
- What are some of the conditions for effective organisation and planning?
- What kind of professional development activities are required for teacher educators?

With respect to governance, participants suggested that all countries should have policy guidelines that provide direction for teacher education development. These guidelines are essential since teacher education is funded

through public funds. Furthermore, decisions about what is taught, how it is assessed and what kind of product is produced by the institutions cannot be left solely to teacher educators. Participants cautioned, however, in the use of legislation and tight control on the colleges that will constrain them in their attempts to innovate and to provide quality teacher education.

The group considered mechanisms for developing the teacher education curriculum and recommended the establishment of national committees comprising various stakeholders to advise on content and to monitor developments in teacher education.

The group also recommended that the teacher education curriculum should have the following:

- an appropriate balance between content and pedagogy
- the opportunity for development and practice of skills and competencies
- the relevant content to enable teachers to meet the needs of children in a modern environment
- a mix of learning experiences for the cognitive, affective and personal development of the teachers
- options to cater for the special need of countries and for training in specialist areas.

Further, the group recommended the establishment of mechanisms for motivating and retaining teachers in the profession and arrangements for reflection on practice.

The practicum in teacher education was also considered in discussing quality of teacher education. Participants agreed that the arrangements for the practicum in many of the Commonwealth Caribbean countries were inadequate. The purpose and duration of the practicum should be reviewed. The group suggested that the practicum should provide teachers with the opportunity to develop and practise skills and to reflect on their teaching. Some participants agreed that an internship year at the end of two years at the teachers' colleges might be beneficial in helping teachers to acquire desirable skills and attitudes for the teaching profession.

The group also noted the importance of on-going professional development in ensuring quality teacher education. In order to develop and implement appropriate activities there should be close collaboration between the institutions and the schools. Retraining in some areas, such as clinical supervision, was also considered necessary.

With respect to instructional leadership, concern was expressed about the demands made on teachers' college principals who find that they have to devote a great deal of time to management concerns. Many of the principals do not have training in management. The group recommended courses in management for the principals to help them to deal with the complex issues involved in the teacher education system.

On staff quality considerations, recommendations were made for the following:

- professional development activities through collaboration between the university and the colleges
- on-going staff development activities at the colleges
- school-based sessions for the teacher educators
- establishment of performance standards for teacher educators.

Teaching/learning issues

In the deliberations related to teaching and learning, the group recommended a research activity to investigate what constitutes an effective teacher in the Caribbean context. The group suggested that the steps in such a research project could include identification of the stakeholders; seeking and analysing their views on desired outputs; and, developing and adopting appropriate means of measurement in relation to how such outputs are achieved. Means of measurement could, for example, relate to student academic progress, personal and social development, and to teachers' observations of classroom behaviours.

In discussing teaching/learning issues the group also focused on technology in the classroom. Technology was defined as the full range of aids that teachers can use in the delivery of education. The use of technology in the classroom was another area recommended for research in order to obtain data that would inform the selection of appropriate technology to enhance learning experience.

The status of teachers and teacher educators

This group noted that current views on the status of teachers were mixed and ambiguous. Society has very high expectations of teachers and it is acknowledged that teachers have an important role to play in the development of the country. Yet teachers are not valued. This results in many qualified young people opting for other professions and getting into teaching as a last choice.

Teachers and teacher educators must assume some responsibility for improving their status. Greater attention must be given to professional behaviour which is manifested in the interest the teachers take in the students, and the way in which they assume the responsibility for the development of those in their charge. Teacher educators also need to help the teacher trainees to develop those skills and attitudes that are required for them to behave responsibly in the teaching profession.

The group also noted the importance of establishing career paths for teacher and teacher educators. There are few opportunities for promotion in the existing structure. There is need, therefore, for consultation involving teachers, teacher educators, teachers' unions, policy makers and other stakeholders to review existing arrangements so that there is opportunity for teachers to grow in the profession.

Rewards and incentives are also necessary. These can include monetary incentives or increments; sabbaticals; scholarships; special leave; special allowances; library resources; and provision of journals.

The group recommended the following:

- an in-depth study of career paths for teachers and teacher educators
- the establishment of a system for professional development
- the development of appropriate performance appraisal schemes for teachers and teacher educators
- clarification of the profile of a teacher educator
- the development of a code of ethics for the Caribbean teacher
- clarification of the roles of personnel at different levels in the teaching profession
- support services to deal with problems of 'burn-out' stress and anxiety among teachers and teacher educators.